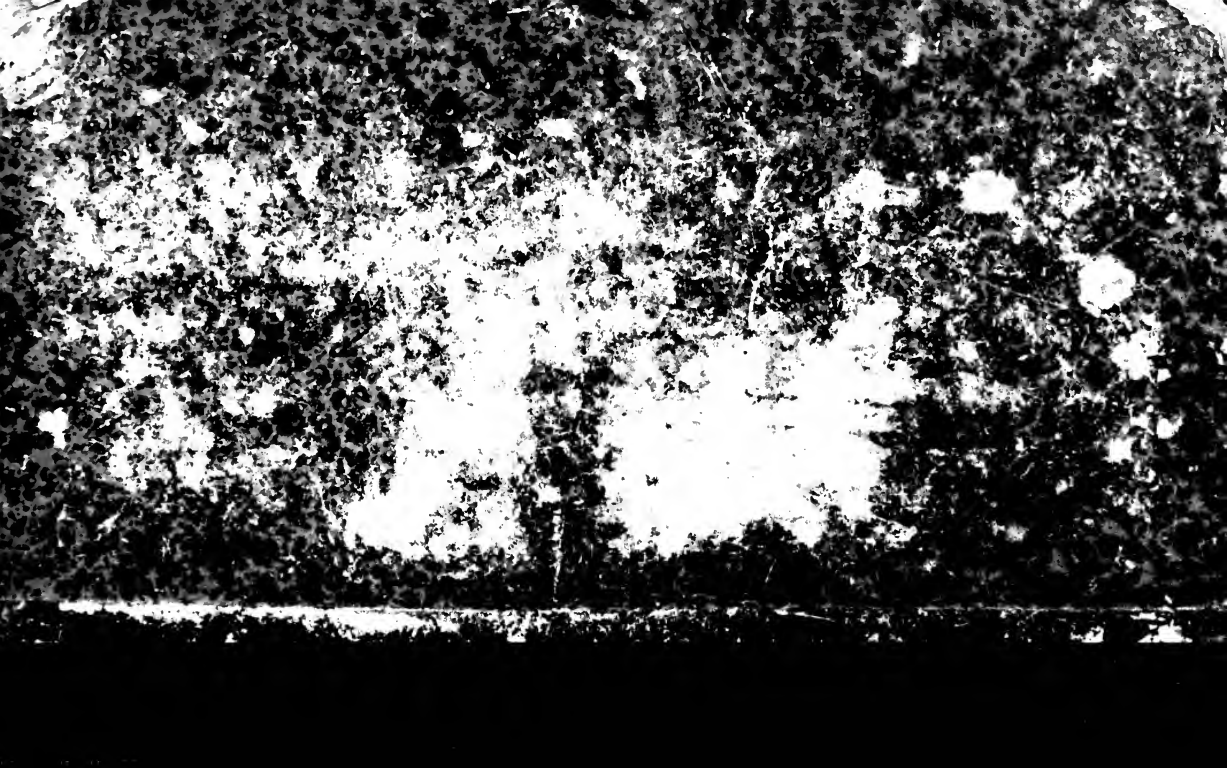

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F. GRANT & Co.

OR,

PARTNERSHIPS.

A STORY FOR THE BOYS WHO "MEAN BUSINESS."

By GEORGE L. CHANEY.

AUNTY PATCH'S HOUSE.

BOSTON:
ROBERTS BROTHERS.
1875.

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RAND, AVERY, & CO.

DEDICATION TO FREDERIC READ

AND

PREFACE TO READER.

DEAR FRED, — I wish you would read this book; and, if you honestly can, tell the other boys to read it. I want you and all the boys to learn now, before it is too late, how to be honest partners in business, and how to keep to your legitimate business, whatever it may be. Fred Grant had to learn this wisdom by a tough experience. How glad I shall be if the story of his misfortunes helps you to escape the like!

Always your friend,

G. L. C.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE.

What was in that Basket? 7

CHAPTER II.

Fresh Eggs 18

CHAPTER III.

Riches begin to take Wings 29

CHAPTER IV.

Bubble, Burst, & Co. 51

CHAPTER V.

Waking up 66

CHAPTER VI.

Business in Full Feather 80

CHAPTER VII.

Vacation 91

CHAPTER VIII.

Berrytown 107

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT'S UP? 121

CHAPTER X.

A SURPRISE 139

CHAPTER XI.

AFLOAT AND ASHORE 155

CHAPTER XII.

SOLON AND LYSANDER 172

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NEW "CO." 187

CHAPTER XIV.

MISCHIEF 203

CHAPTER XV.

CONSEQUENCES 218

CHAPTER XVI.

FRED'S RESOLVE 234

CHAPTER XVII.

GOING TO "MASH" 251

CHAPTER XVIII.

ALL RIGHT 267

F. GRANT & CO.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT WAS IN THAT BASKET?

"HULLO, Jimmy!"

"Hullo, Fred!"

"Where you going?"

"Don't know. Half a mind to go tom-codding. Piles of them down on Thayer's Wharf. Worst of it is, my net has a hole in it big enough for a whale to go through. Tom-cods don't know when they're in, or when they're out."

"Why don't you mend it? Hullo, there's Frank Carter coming down Oak Street! Wonder what he has got in that basket? Oranges, I bet you! The 'Imaum' is just in; and Frank's uncle goes mate. — I say, Frank, give us one, won't you?" cried Fred, as the third boy drew near.

"Yes, if you'll eat it raw," answered Frank, laughing, at the same time holding his basket

with both hands, as if its contents were very heavy, or very precious.

"What is it, though?" said Fred and Jimmy together, beginning to see that they were on the wrong scent.

"Don't you wish you knew?" said Frank, enjoying his secret too well to let it out at the first challenge. The boys guessed and guessed,—oranges, dates, peanuts, gum-copal, every thing they could think of that was nice, and likely to come home in the "Imaum." All wrong; and each new guess was received with great satisfaction by Frank Carter. There is no knowing how long he might have kept his curious friends in the dark, if a sudden movement had not let the cat out of the bag, or, rather, the hen out of the basket.

Yes, it was a hen that was in the basket. The merriment of the boys was no fun to her, that was plain; for she immediately thrust her head out of the basket, and uttered a piercing protest against the whole business.

"Where did you get her, Frank?" "What you going to do with her?" "Let us go with you, will you?" And, amid a multitude of excited questions, the three boys went round to Frank Carter's house, whither the hen was to be taken, and saw the safe landing of the feathered biped into her coop. She was not a captivating creature at that precise moment, being very cross, very fussy, and

not a little indignant at the close carriage in which she had made her last trip. She did not know how much more kindly she had been treated than many of her family are; for Frank was a kind-hearted boy, and refused to take the hen by the legs, as the poultry-men do, and as her previous owner had recommended. He had just bought the hen, because she wanted to set; and in the inner coop there was as perfect a nest as Frank could make, with thirteen eggs in it, pure Brahmas; and Biddy was expected to believe that this was the same nest which she had stolen under Farmer Green's barn, and that these were her identical dozen and one, and nothing else. Whether in ignorance or in pity, I cannot tell; but certainly, in an incredibly short time, to the delight of the boys, who were eagerly watching the experiment, Biddy did find the nest, and did graciously accept it. And, when Jimmy and Fred peeped into the corner where she had settled herself most contentedly, the funny old hen looked at them out of her half-closed eye; and the boys declared she winked at them in the best-natured manner possible.

"I say, Fred," said Jimmy, as they went home that afternoon, "wouldn't it be fun to keep hens? But what can a fellow do in these mean old city houses, with no good yards? Frank's father has a good yard, and so have

you; but there isn't room to turn around in ours."

Fred did not say much in answer to Jimmy; but he was thinking and thinking, just as eagerly as his companion, about the delights of a poultry-yard. The truth is, both boys had taken the hen-fever: the only difference between them was, that Jimmy had broken out with it, and Fred had it internally as yet.

Now, my young reader, do not be funny, and ask if the hen-fever is any relation to the chicken-pox. Not the least in the world. The chicken-pox is a mere baby-sickness, soon come, and soon gone. The hen-fever is never cured: once get it, and you never lose it. You may think, for a time, that you have been cured of it; but let a neighboring agricultural fair advertise a poultry-show, and off you will go, as wild as ever, to see, admire, covet, and, unless some discreet friend goes with you to hold you in check, to buy and set up a coop again. There are various stages in the disease. You begin by seeing a brood of chickens running around in their soft flannel dresses, in a neighbor's yard, or in front of a farmer's doorway. You stop to watch their pretty ways. How obedient they are to their mother, who walks about, and governs them by her short, authoritative cluck! You despise the suggestion that their obedience is prompted by

greed or self-defence. To you it is a perfect picture of motherly care and filial devotion. "Pretty little chickens!" said a sentimental victim of the fever: "do they bite?" Farther on in the distemper, you grow abstracted in society. You are thinking how you can make these chickens, or their equals, your own. Your castles in the air begin to take the shape of wonderful coops, filled with every variety of fowl, and furnished with all the modern improvements. But why take the time to describe the symptoms of the complaint, when our young friends are prepared to show us the fever in its typical form, as the doctors say?

Fred did not say much in answer to Jimmy's suggestion about the hens; but he brooded over it. Brooding is one of the early processes in the hen-fever. That very evening, just after supper, when his father was taking a look about the garden to see how the tulips were coming up, Fred suddenly broke out, "O father! I wish I could keep hens! Frank Carter does. He has two broods of chickens already; and he set another hen to-day, — real Brahmas, father, with feathered legs, and roosters that can eat, off the top of a flour-barrel. I wish I could!"

"Wish you could eat, off the top of a flour-barrel, Fred? Well, you can, I think, if you try hard."

"No, I don't mean that. You know what I mean. Won't you let me keep hens, father, in the backyard? There's room enough. That piece between the barn and the fence is large enough. It isn't used for any thing but rubbish. I wish I could build a coop there, and cut a hole into the old tool-room for the hens to go and lay in."

"Look out, my boy! don't step on that tulip."

Fred was jumping about in the excitement of his new idea, forgetting the rule to keep in the walk. If he had been possessed by a hundred hens, he could not have scratched up the garden any more than he did in these first stages of the fever.

"Oh, I didn't see it!" cried Fred, really sorry for his carelessness; for the boy liked flowers, and took pride in the fine display of early tulips which made his father's garden a bright spot to the neighbors and the weary people in the street. Only the day before, he had been more interested in these tulips than in any thing else. But now nothing would please him perfectly, but a "good fat hen."

"Father, mayn't I?" he said, again returning to the former question.

"Mayn't you step on tulips? No, thank you."

"Oh, now, father, you're too bad! You know what I mean as well as can be. I'm in real ear-

nest. Do let me keep hens, — just one, father. Jimmy Pratt will go shares with me; and, if we put our savings-bank money together, we can get enough to begin with. I know the coop will cost something. But we boys can make almost the whole of it. Any boy can nail on laths. Won't you, father?"

Mr. Grant was as kind a father as any boy ever had. He would much rather indulge his children in every wish they might express than deny them. It hurt his feelings more than his children's to disappoint them in any plan of theirs.

But he could not always consent to their wishes as soon as they were expressed. Many things needed to be considered, which young heads did not think of. If Fred had been willing to trust his father's affection and judgment, he might have gone to bed that night a happier boy. But he could not wait. He wanted to press his father to a promise on the spot. So he kept teasing and fretting, "Oh! mayn't I? I should think you might! Promise, father;" at the same time, leaping and kicking about the garden, like corn in a popper.

The end of it was, that he was sent into the house, and told to go early to bed; which he did in the following manner: first he ran down to the oval bed, just for a look at the crocuses; then he skipped towards the garden-gate, —

"Fred!"

"Yes, sir: I'm going."

Then, passing through the gate, he went shuffling along the brick pavement as if he were anxious to wear out the soles of his shoes. And finally he went in at the side-door, giving it an ugly slam. That was his good-night to the best of fathers, because Mr. Grant did not say at once, "Certainly, my boy, you shall have the hens."

The truth was, Mr. Grant was a victim of the hen-fever himself. He took it early in life, when he lived upon a Vermont farm, and fed the chickens every night and morning. And, as we have said, once is always with this complaint. The cares of business in the city, and the pressure for room, had hitherto prevented the indulgence of this inbred taste. But now that he found himself in a larger house than at first, with good yard-room, and a family of children to take the chief care of them, he greatly enjoyed the thought of having a colony of hens and chickens on his domain. He knew the objections, however, as well as the attractions, of the plan; and he was not willing to promise until he had consulted others, whose comfort was more at stake than his own in such a matter as this. There was sick Miss Pleasant across the street. Would the uproar of the coop trouble her? There was his wife, priding herself on her tidy housekeeping, and Norah her chief of staff: what would they say? Besides all

else, there was the expense, — not of one hen or two, or of one small coop. Mr. Grant knew very well that the fever grew by what it fed on, quite as rapidly as the chickens grew by the same process. But, in spite of all these objections, there was a lurking inclination towards the poultry-yard in his mind. Somehow the eager crowing of his young son — for Fred had told how he meant to supply the family with eggs, and spring chickens of the tenderest description — had provoked an answering crow from his own heart; just as one rooster starts another afar off. This sensible man really believed, for the moment, that a judicious keeping of hens might be made profitable as well as pleasant. Oh that fever! how it blinds the eyes, and consumes the purses, of its victims!

Mr. Grant would have been ashamed to confess how much he really wished to keep hens himself. If there had been no other objection, Fred's teasing and ill-temper were enough to discourage it. His father did not come to any conclusion that night. Still the proposition haunted him; and he awoke the next morning with the distinct sound of a rooster, a monstrous Brahma, crowing in his ears. It was only a dream. Fred's desire had been the theme of a lively discussion between father and mother the last thing the night before; and the dream was the echo of their speech. Mrs. Grant had received a tearful account from Fred,

of his longing for the society of a good fat hen, and, with mother's fondness, had agreed to plead for him. One objection was closed by her consent. Then Fred looked so eager that morning at breakfast, and yet so painfully anxious not to tease or show any ugliness! His mother had warned him against that. "Good-morning, father!" did not sound much like his slam-bang good-night of the evening before. It was the voice of Jacob, and the hair of Esau. This rough-and-tumble little fellow was as soft spoken as a girl this morning. O you mothers! how well you understand us husbands and fathers!

Mr. Grant's heart was almost won. At any rate, he would go over to Miss Pleasant's, and inquire how she was, and whether the poultry-yard would annoy her. He did not say this out aloud, he said it to himself: not a bad sign. But Fred would have been better pleased if he had said it aloud. Boys do not know what kind things their fathers are thinking when they say very little. Mr. Grant went to his business without a word on the all-important subject. Alice and Mary, Fred's two older sisters, hurried away to their school, which was quite a long walk from their home. Tom Grant, the oldest son, a young man of twenty, followed his father to the store. Twenty years earlier, it was the other way in business: then the *young* man went first. Mrs. Grant had a hun-

dred things to do before night; and poor Fred was left with nothing to console him but the hard necessity of being at school promptly at half-past eight, and reciting his arithmetic at nine. He hadn't looked at his sums.

CHAPTER II.

FRESH EGGS.

HOW strange it is, that, the instant you get a new idea, every thing you see reminds you of it! Mr. Grant had passed Towle's grocery-store every morning for the previous month; and every morning, from the same pane in the corner-window, a showy advertisement of White's Champion Game Blacking had looked out at him. But it was not until this morning that he noticed the design. There was an immense boot, highly polished, and a game-cock, with neck-feathers standing out like the fierce rays of an angry sun, driving at his own reflection in the boot. A boy as black and shining as the boot — the result of Nature's blacking — stood by, highly delighted with the scene. Mr. Grant fairly stopped in the street to admire the picture, and passed on, smiling. It was the game-cock that stopped him. What did he care for White's Blacking?

An hour later, when Mrs. Grant was stopping at the market on her way down town, to order some

butter, she remembered that Norah wanted some fresh eggs. "Have you any fresh eggs?" she asked Mr. Porter. "Yes 'um," said Porter, pointing to a huge box: "them's fresh." Just think of it, a hundred dozen eggs all fresh! There was nothing better: so Mrs. Grant took a dozen. But she said to herself as she went away, "Now, if we only had hens, how nice it would be!"

It certainly looks as if Fred would get his wish.

But he, poor fellow, does not see it. At that very moment he was up in arithmetic. "Grant," said Miss Rush, "you may take the eleventh example."

"If a dozen and a half of eggs cost a dollar and a half, how much will one egg cost?"

The blood rushed to Fred's face as he read the question. It seemed as if the old 'rithmetic was telling his secret. He repeated the question, according to rule, and then started on the solution.

"If a dozen and a half cost a dollar and a half, one dozen will cost — no, one egg will cost as many — no, as much as one and a half is contained" — And then, thinking he had better dispose of the question in parts, he suddenly dropped the fraction, and tried to get at the value of one egg from the whole numbers. But you cannot drop half a dozen eggs without getting into trouble; and Fred had to pick them up again, rather the worse for the fall. To complete his

misery, he began to talk, by slip of tongue, about half an egg being worth so much. All the boys laughed; and Fred sat down in disgrace.

He did not go out to play at recess. He knew the boys would be teasing him about his blunder. It was a sensitive subject for more reasons than the boys knew. He had to take their raillery after school, however. Even Jimmy, his best friend, joined the crowd, and wanted to know the value of "a half an egg." Jimmy little knew what flattering business-prospects were imperilled by his love of a joke. Fred had resolved to take Jimmy into partnership, if his proposals to his father about the hen-trade were favorably received. The day was coming when the value of half an egg would be a serious question to Jimmy.

There, I have as much as told you how it all turned out, and how the famous firm of "F. Grant & Co." came into existence.

That evening, when the family were taking tea, the talk running upon the various doings of the day, Mr. Grant said to his wife, "I called on our sick neighbor, Miss Pleasant, as I was coming home from the store."

"Did you?" said Mrs. Grant: "I am very glad. I intended to go there myself; but my errands down town took all the time. How is she?"

"No worse, I think, but no better, either. I fear

she will never be well. She was very grateful for the fresh sponge-cake you sent her to-day."

"Oh, yes! Norah took it over. She is very good to praise it, I am sure. Norah was not satisfied with her luck, or rather with the eggs she was obliged to use. She privately informed me that she 'believed they were laid in the ark, mum.'"

"She judged by internal evidence, I suppose," said young Tom, stealing a phrase from Dr. Blessum's sermon of the previous Sunday.

A dry smile about the corners of Mr. Grant's mouth, and a look of quiet reproof from Mrs. Grant, were the only answers Tom received. Meantime Fred, who had taken no interest in the visit to Miss Pleasant, not seeing its connection with his heart's desire, suddenly entered into the discussion with an earnest statement that "Frank Carter's folks had new-laid eggs every day." His father smiled such a promising smile at this, that Fred began at once to take courage. Yes, Mr. Grant had seen Miss Pleasant, and, among other things, had asked if the noise of roosters crowing and hens cackling in the next yard would trouble her. "Not at all," the good-natured invalid replied. It would remind her of the dear home in the country where she lived when a girl. She would enjoy it above all things.

"Miss Pleasant shall have the first egg that's laid!" cried Fred, jumping at once to the conclu-

sion that father would let him have the hens. He could scarcely restrain himself long enough to eat his supper. No: all he wanted was a bit of sponge-cake, and he was running away from the table with that. But this was contrary to rule: so he hurriedly ate the cake, and gasped out a request that he might be excused.

"Where are you going, Fred?" said his father.

"Oh! into Jimmy Pratt's, to see if he will go partners with me."

"Better not be too hasty, my boy. Partners are more easily got than got rid of."

"But Jimmy wants to keep hens awfully. And his father hasn't any good yard. I should like to ask him father; mayn't I?"

Mr. Grant never discouraged any generous purpose in his children, if he could avoid it. When he found that Fred wished to give his friend pleasure, and not merely to make gain from him, he let him go, only saying: "Be home in an hour, Fred. I will furnish the coop. You and Jimmy shall buy the first hens with your box-money, if Jimmy agrees. But you understand, Fred, if you go into partnership, you must always act for your partner's good as well as your own; and you can take no important step without his consent."

Of course, Fred knew that. Hadn't he been doing business all his life in partnerships? Was not he a partner in the variety-store of "Wells,

Smith, & Co.," a year or two before? and had not he held a leading interest in the great combination show of "Bubble, Burst, & Co."? If I should tell you about these once noted business combinations, you would understand the reason of Mr. Grant's warning. His son had indeed been a prominent member of each of these firms; and I regret to say that he had not come out of them with either profit or honor. The variety-store had been opened in Fred's barn, because it had a window on the street. Wells was the senior partner, both because he was older in years, and because he contributed most of the stock in trade. Smith was a smart, driving young fellow, born with an instinct for trade, a valuable member; and Fred was the "Co." It would take too much time to give you an account of their stock. It embraced nearly every thing that could be bought for pins. Yes, pins were the currency among boys in those days: no mere paper slips, which might be counterfeited. When you see a pin, you know it. If it is bent, you can see it. If its head is off, you see it. If you are in doubt about its point, a very simple experiment will test that question. Why do not men use pins for money? As I was saying, Wells, Smith, & Co. kept almost every thing that could be bought for pins. The window fronting on Pine Street showed to the public, or would have done so if its panes had been clean, a tempting array.

There were fly-catchers made of old writing-books, — little square boxes, with a front-door for the flies to enter, and a brown spot of molasses just inside the door, looking like a door-mat, on which the flies were expected, not exactly to wipe their feet, but to stick them in the forgetfulness of their sweet repast. There were windmills, their sails made of the same old writing-books, and pinned to the end of a stick. Held against the wind in the hands of a swift boy, they would whizz around so briskly, that you could hardly tell whether it was the boy who ran them, or they who ran the boy. Rosy-cakes, in the season of roses, were also a choice commodity. The square envelopes, made again out of old writing-books, contained sugar and rose-petals in nearly equal parts, and so compounded by a gentle application of the hammer, that they came out like a cake on opening the paper-shell. Some of the older customers had scruples about eating cakes baked in this manner by friction in inky paper; but the boys despised such superior nicety. There were other refreshments of a more substantial character: gingerbread in fanciful shape, — Jim Crows, elephants, goats, and cats. Norah had been teased into furnishing this department, after designs procured at the tinman's. There was a strange resemblance between the cat and the elephant, and the goat and Jim Crow, which Norah explained by saying

that "the critturs run together after she put 'em into the oven." If they did, it was the only life-like thing about them. They never ran anywhere else, or looked as if their legs could hold them upright, much less run.

But the liveliest trade of Wells, Smith, & Co., was in liquid refreshments, — lemonade, ginger-water, molasses-water, licorice-water, currant-ale, and raspberry-shrub, all in tall black bottles, standing at one end of the counter, and politely lifting their cork hats to every customer who could pay as high as ten pins. As one tumbler had to serve for the distribution of these various drinks, and neither seller nor customer was over nice about the rinsing, it often happened that he who called for one flavor found himself the happy sharer in all. Thus a tumbler of licorice-water would catch a speck of ginger from its preceding draught, and find its too much sweetness improved by the addition; or a stray lemon-seed or bit of peel would, after the lemonade had been well disposed of, still hang around the bewitching tumbler. These were some of the features in the great variety-store, of which Fred had been the active "Co."

It is worth our while to recall this previous business-venture of Fred's, because it illustrates at once his fondness for partnerships, and his early inability to be perfectly fair in such relations.

For one day in an interval of business, — such intervals, by the way, were not infrequent, after the novelty wore off, — the two younger members of the firm might have been seen in a carpenter's yard on Pine Street, disporting themselves among the timber there, while the senior partner had gone away on an errand for his mother. Smith & Co., i.e., Smith and Fred, were having a lively time on a teeter, which they had made by placing a stout board, not too rough, upon a wooden horse that stood in the yard. There had already been some unpleasantness between the boys on the subject of their chances for the presidency of the United States; Smith blasting Fred's political hopes by quoting a newspaper paragraph, which said that nobody whose name began with G would ever be president. Oh, how happy Fred would have been, if he could have foreknown that U. S. Grant would be twice elected president! — "a man whose name not only began with 'G,' but was followed by an 'R' and an 'A' and an 'N' and a 'T.' So!" That is the way in which he would have demolished Smith's argument, if he had foreknown. But, not having this defence, he was obliged to defer to the newspaper, that great authority with small boys. He was still smarting from the disaster his presidential hopes had suffered, when an uncommonly hard bump of Smith's end of the teeter pitched him forward, bringing

his hands into sharp contact with some splinters on the sides of the board, and bringing him down again in an emphatic manner, not at all soothing to his ruffled feelings.

"Now, stop that, Smith! That's mean. Let me down, or it will be worse for you!" cried Fred.

"Don't get mad, Co.," said the provoking Smith, giving his end a gentle thud upon the ground, and making Fred take another pitch forward. The junior, never remarkable for an easy temper, became furious at this. There is no knowing what he would have done to Smith, if he had had him at the elevation where he was himself. But when his feet touched the ground, after a little more teasing, a sudden thought seized him, which quite changed his purpose of striking Smith. Now, what do you think he did, boys?

"Went off mad, and wouldn't speak to Smith again as long as he lived!"

There is no doubt that he went away mad. I believe he seriously intended not to speak to Smith for the remainder of his natural life. But he had a far more definite plan of revenge in his mind than that. He went straight to the shop on Pine Street, and drank up all the licorice-water.

Fortunately for Smith and Wells, and still more fortunately for Fred, the other bottles were nearly empty. Such was the boy's rage, that I believe he would have disposed of the entire stock in trade,

if the licorice-water had not proved a surfeit. The next day he and Smith were as good friends as ever; and Fred had to make the loss good, which was all he gained by getting angry.

I mention this to show you that F. Grant had not always been perfectly just in his co-partnerships.

It was exactly the same in the great combination show of Bubble, Burst, & Co. But I cannot stop to tell about that, or it will be long past bedtime before I get Fred safely back from Jimmy Pratt's, whither he was running when we saw him last, with the joyful news that he was going to keep hens, and "how would Jimmy like to go shares?"

CHAPTER III.

RICHES BEGIN TO TAKE WINGS.

OF course you know what makes more noise than a pig under a gate, — two pigs. Well, then, you know what is a happier sight than a boy who is allowed to keep hens, — two boys who are allowed to keep hens. Jimmy was in such a state of delight at the opportunity of engaging in this profitable pastime, that he instantly ran to his sleeping-room, where his savings-bank — a tin house, with an open chimney, into which his pennies flew like swallows, but out of which they came like turtles —was kept in the right-hand back corner of the bureau-drawer, and returned with all the money he was worth in the world. After much coaxing and shaking, and, in very obstinate cases, some assistance with a knitting-needle, Jimmy succeeded in emptying his bank without breaking it; a thing which cannot be done with a real bank, you know. His entire fortune was found to consist of fifty-two cents, or, more exactly, forty-two cents in coppers, and two half-

dimes. "Enough to buy one hen, any way," he said; and father would give him a quarter, he guessed. Fred did not know the amount of his worldly possessions exactly, but was sure his father would make up whatever was lacking. Boys always think their fathers are made of gold. And thus on the strength, partly of their own capital, but largely in the expectation of help from their fathers, they entered into partnership.

It was as good a beginning as half the young men who enter upon more serious business engagements make. I wonder if more of them would not succeed, if they had nothing to back them but a good backbone. There were no legal formalities in the formation of this new firm. The possibility of trouble in such a glorious business never occurred to these young enthusiasts. Each boy would own one hen, and half the rooster, at the beginning; and of course the expenses of keeping would be shared equally between them. But that would not amount to any thing: the eggs would pay for the "keep." Mr. Grant would furnish the coop without rent, and all would be smooth sailing when the stock was secured.

What a pity it was so late! The boys would have set out on a poultry-hunt that very moment, had it not been past the hour when all sensible hens went to roost. Where should they buy their hens? Where did Frank Carter get his setting-

hen? they wondered. "Oh! I remember: at Farmer Green's," said Jimmy; "over in South Jeruh, you know, Fred, where we went for violets last Saturday."

"Hepaticas, you mean," said Fred in his superior way. Catch Fred, or any public-school boy, conscious from his second copy-book that knowledge is power, losing a chance of correcting anybody! Fred's better knowledge of flowers came from having two sisters who knew all the wild-flowers, and encouraged his fondness for them.

"Well, hepaticas, then, or *she*patikas; any thing you like," said Jimmy, to whom every wild flower was a violet, unless it was a dandelion. "But don't you remember the old farmhouse just beyond Stanley's, on the other side, in back, behind some old buttonwood-trees? You must remember the barn, and the great red ox for a weathercock."

"Oh, yes! is that Green's? I remember. Does he sell hens? We'll go and see his coops to-morrow. Does he keep Brahmas, I wonder?"

"He keeps hens, if that is what you mean," said Jimmy, whose knowledge of the various breeds of poultry was on a par with his knowledge of flowers.

"Oh, yes, of course! but I meant, does he keep Brahmas, or — or — or some other kind of hens," said Fred; his own knowledge of the varieties stopping short with this famous breed.

"Some other kind, I guess," answered Jimmy. "We'll go and see. For my part, I want the kind that lays eggs."

The young partners might have talked on until midnight, in the warmth of their new hopes, if Mrs. Pratt had not called Jimmy to come and study his arithmetic for the morrow.

"Oh, bother!" said the boy to his visitor; at the same time calling to his mother, "Yes, in a minute. I say, Fred," added Jimmy in a laughing tone, so good-natured that nobody could take offence, "if a dozen and a half of eggs cost" —

"Get out!" cried Fred. "I'll let you know what half an egg will cost, one of these days."

Unconscious prophet! he meant nothing by his threat. He only uttered it to ward off a joke. Nevertheless, his word was prophecy.

"Shall we go to-morrow afternoon, Fred?"

"Yes, I should like to; but, no, we can't get the hens till we have the coop. Let us wait until Saturday. I think we can get the old tool-room ready by that time, and perhaps the outside coop too. Good-night, Jimmy."

"Good-night, Fred."

It was not a difficult task to make the coop. Two hens and a rooster do not need a big house in which to begin housekeeping. It being once decided that the thing was to be done, Mr. Grant

made his arrangements with the carpenter at once; and, on Saturday of that week, the coop was finished.

"Be ready to start at two o'clock," had been Fred's last word to Jimmy, when they parted at his gate, after the morning session on this same Saturday. At ten minutes before two, Jimmy might have been seen in Fred's yard, peering through the slats of the empty coop, and joyously imagining how it would look when the hens arrived. Fred had got their supper ready for them, — a handful of corn in a saucer, and a cup of water; both cup and saucer borrowed from the family breakfast-set. The carpenter having forgotten the roosts, Fred had put up a rake-handle, whose smooth surface would be about as easy a resting-place for ordinary hens as for Fred himself, if he had undertaken to keep his footing upon it. But, say what one would of the roost, the nests were perfection. Fred had made them himself, and no hen but a Dorking could have equalled his workmanship; unless it be some other hen with five toes. The five fingers of Fred's right hand, spread out as much like a hen's claw as Fred could make them, had run themselves through and through and round and about that hay, till it looked as snug and convenient, for all practical purposes, as a door-mat.

"Come along, Jimmy," was Fred's prompt sum-

mons, as he came running from the side-doorstep: "have you brought your money?"

"Yes, seventy-five cents. Father made me earn the other twenty-three chopping kindling-wood. He said he didn't believe in young folks going into business on borrowed capital, or on their father's earnings."

"I'm going to pay father back in eggs," said Fred. "I had to borrow twenty-five cents of him."

South Jeruh, whither the boys were going, was a suburb of Old Jeruh. One of the city streets came to a stand-still by the town-pump, just below Pine Street, as if to refresh itself for further progress. Three streets besides Pine might have contended for the honor of its name when it passed the pump; and probably would, if, fortunately, each of these connecting streets had not had a good name of its own. The long one, named for Washington because he had come into town over it when he visited Jeruh, stretched along rather dismally for a while, flanked by a dock on one side, and planing-mills on the other, which kept up a deafening scream to the terror of horses, and the agony of those who were driving them. The boys passed these lions on either hand, at the entrance to the palace of their young desires, Farmer Green's hennery; and came to a drawbridge, which fortunately was not up. If it had been up, both boys in their impatience would have declared

that it was just their luck. But as it was down, and did not interfere in the least with their plans, but carried them safely over the stream, they forgot to say that it was their luck.

Once over the bridge, Washington Street, or Avenue as the people now call it (it was nothing but Squam Road before Washington came over it), began to improve. Fred and Jimmy had a stretch of a full mile between them and Stanley's, the old manorial seat of one of Jeruh's old aristocracy; and Green's farmhouse was beyond that. But it was pleasant walking. What could be pleasanter, on a warm spring day, than a walk to Stanley's? — the street broad and lively with people taking their afternoon drives; the neat houses on either side, each attended by pretty yards or gardens. Hyacinths and crocuses were up and blooming in sunny exposures, and the lilac buds were bursting with eager life. Elm-trees, now and then varied with horse-chestnuts or lindens, adorned both sides of the long avenue; and, as it approached Stanley's, as if conscious of their mighty neighborhood, the elms towered into magnificent proportions, and made a grand archway. At least, the Stanleys were proud of the elms, if the elms were not proud of the Stanleys; and when one knows that these trees have been planted by the Stanley family, and are still sacredly defended from the axe of improvement by their descend-

ants, it seems just and natural that they should be proud of one another. But proud or not, be your name Stanley or Smith, I do not envy you, if you could walk along this glorious highway, and not feel delighted with it. Fred and Jimmy, for all their minds were bent on bargains and trade, could not escape the charm of the journey. The robins, singing away up in the tall elms, seemed to say to them, "Go it, boys, go it, boys!" And they did go it, as fast as their feet would carry them; now stopping a minute to look at Parkman's garden, and again making up for their loss of time by wild races to see which would reach the corner or the next elm-tree first. "Just look at that schooner, Jimmy!" And the boys looking across the road, and down a sloping green field, could see the waters of the harbor sparkling with a thousand eyes, and chased with swimming vessels of every description. Beyond the waters, the land offered its arm to the sea, which was very promptly taken by the same, and a likely couple they made of it. I do not know but I have made the man take the woman's arm in this fine figure. If I have, I beg pardon; for of all absurd, not to say indecent customs now coming into practice among certain classes of the people, this one of having the man take the woman's arm is the worst. It reminds me of poor Fred's blunder, the first party he ever attended. When sup-

per was announced, he ran up to pretty Sadie Balch, and, without so much as "By your leave," took her by the arm to lead her to supper. If you could have seen the blush and flash with which that young lady reversed arms, you would be sure never to make that mistake with a lady. Fred never did such a thing again.

But the sea. It was splendid that day; just like a coop of Jersey Blues with white combs, as Fred might have said later on in the hen-fever. As it was, he merely enjoyed it because it was like itself. That was enough. A quarter of a mile farther on, and the sea-view is lost behind a rocky bluff; and under the bluff, sheltered from the raw north-easters, that sometimes made Jeruh harbor, and shielded from the full beams of the sun by some ancient shade-trees, stood Farmer Green's homestead.

But something better than Farmer Green's house was standing in front of it, as the boys approached. Little Molly Green was there, looking in the strip of garden which surrounded the house to see if she could find any Cupid's Delights in bloom. Cupid's Delights, indeed! She only needed to look in the glass any day to see a face which Cupid would have delighted in at first sight. No, boys! I shall not tell you whether her eyes were brown or blue, or what color her hair was, or any thing about her. I am not writ-

ing a love-story, and I will not have you falling in love, and interfering with the business in hand. My work is to describe the business transactions of F. Grant & Co., and Molly Green was not a partner in that firm. I will not say that the boys would not have taken her in with gladness, if she had chosen to enter into partnership; but she gave them no opportunity to make any such proposals. Looking up as she caught the sound of their footsteps, she stopped an instant; and, before they could inquire for her father, she had bounded into the farmhouse door, like a wild young creature of nature, as, indeed, she was. The boys came up to the door, in no way disconcerted by this rather ungracious reception, and knocked. A woman with a flushed but pleasant face, only a little disturbed at the interruption of a visitor on Saturday afternoon, opened the door, and asked the boys what they wanted.

"To see Mr. Green, and buy some of his hens," said Jimmy.

"Well, I donno' about selling the hens, jest as they're comin' on to lay," said Mrs. Green, for it was the farmer's wife; "but you can come in, and set down, boys."

I give you her very words. "Come in, and *set* down," said Mrs. Green, just as if she was talking to hens, and not to boys, "and father will be up in a minute. He's gone down the lane a little ways."

The boys were not at all unwilling to come in, and "set down." But whether it was the cheerful kitchen, with its rich smell of the good things that went into the Saturday baking, or something else, that drew them, somebody else must decide. A pair of bright eyes were looking out of the pantry doorway at the time: that is all that I know.

"O Jiminy! What a nice kitchen!" said Fred. He did not say "Jimmy," or I should have written it so. He said "Jiminy." I do not pretend that the expression is elegant. I only say it was what Fred said.

Jimmy made no answer, unless the pleasure that beamed from his face was an answer. He sat looking at every thing, and trying to take it all in. But he couldn't do it. No boy could. Twenty boys together couldn't take in the contents of one of Mrs. Green's Saturday bakes. It was as much as the great oven itself could do; and after the pies, and "ceteras," as Mrs. Green called the attendant turnovers and tarts, there were the Sunday pudding and beans to go in and pass the night. Oh! mustn't they have slept warm? She was taking out the pies and "*ceteras*" when the boys knocked at the door; and she returned to her occupation without ceremony, thrusting a long shovel into the oven, and drawing the plates to the mouth, and then seizing them with a coarse

towel, and placing them on the brick hearth, before one could say "Jack Robinson."

"Molly!" called her mother, as she landed the last beauty of a pie upon the hearth, "can't you hand the boys a tart? I guess these young gentlemen wouldn't be the worse for a bit of our baking. Would you, boys? Bring in those turnovers that we tried the oven with, Molly: they must be cool by this time."

A bang of the pantry-door was the only answer from Molly; followed by a subdued bang of another door farther away, which said, as plainly as words, that Molly had gone. Mrs. Green only laughed at her child's disobedience. She seemed accustomed to it. "She's a bashful little goose," said Mrs. Green, half apologizing for Molly's shyness, and more than half admiring it. The boys looked as if their sympathies were divided between admiration for the pretty girl, and concern lest they should lose their treat by her refusal to bring it. The latter feeling was uppermost however, as their significant glances from the good housewife to the pantry and back again clearly showed.

But they did not know Mrs. Green if they thought that there was any doubt about her generous intention to treat them. She went herself to the pantry, and brought out a platter of flaky turnovers all tucked in around the edge, and trying in vain to keep the secret of their delicious con-

tents. It would come out; but the smell would have betrayed them if the mince had not. "Don't be bashful, boys," said that delightful woman: the boys loved her already as if they had known her all their lives, instead of only fifteen minutes. And they did eat. "Try a crooked S, boys," said Mrs. Green, after each had despatched a mince turnover. "Try a tart," after that; and so I believe that woman would have kept them eating all night if the pantry-door had not suddenly opened, when they were hesitating about another tart, and a girl's voice cried out, "Pap's coming!" A loud bang of the door following this announcement almost drowned the sentence; but the farmer's step in the doorway told the same story, and confirmed Molly's clamorous report.

"Here's some young gentlemen wanting to buy hens," explained the woman, as her husband came into the kitchen, and looked in a surprised but kindly way at the boys.

"Oh! ah! I didn't know but they was going into the baking business," said Farmer Green jokingly. "They seem to take to the '*ceteras*,' mother."

"Now, ain't you ashamed, Mr. Green? Anybody'd think you'd never been a boy yourself, and eat turnovers by the dozens. Don't you mind him, boys. Take another, do; now, don't you be skeered."

"So you're going into the hen-business, boys," said the farmer. "How much cash shall you put in?"

"Oh! we have got seventy-five cents apiece," said Fred; "and father gives us the coop, and the eggs will pay for the corn, you know."

"Oh, yes, to be sure!" said Mr. Green, just as if he saw it with Fred's eyes; but his own eyes had a merry twinkle in them which seemed to say, "Oh, yes, you think so! but I'm not so sure about that."

"Well, how many hens do you expect to buy with your money?" he went on.

"We don't know: as many as you will let us have," said Fred.

"Frank Carter told us that you let him have a hen for thirty cents," said Jimmy, whose eye for a bargain was clearer than Fred's.

"Yes," said the farmer, "but that was a setting-hen: she was in my way. I couldn't sell another 'z cheap as that."

"Suppose you go and look at the hens," said Mrs. Green: "perhaps you can find some to suit you. Don't you be skeered, boys: he'll let you have some; he never says 'Yes' till he's said 'No.'"

"Wall, I declare, Hannah, if that ain't a pretty thing for you to say about me! Who was it said 'No,' and kept saying it, till the minister made her say 'Yes,' I should like to know?"

"Come, go along," said Mrs. Green, redder than the oven ever made her: "I want to clean up the kitchen."

So the farmer and the boys went out; and there in the centre of the yard was a sight that made their eyes shine brighter than they shone at the pies. Molly had found out by listening at the door that the boys wanted to buy some hens: so, nothing loath to show them any favor which would not bring her too near them, she had filled her apron with corn; and there she stood with hens, chickens, and roosters all around her, ready for the customers to make their choice. She knew they would not touch her hen: nobody wanted "Whitey" but herself; for poor "Whitey" had once broken her leg, and was terribly lame. Molly had saved her life when Farmer Green was about to kill her, and that was the reason Molly loved her. Boys, if you want to love anybody go and do them a kindness. Seeing the boys coming nearer, Molly quickly scattered all the corn she had, and ran to the woodshed, which was near by, and from which she could see and hear without being seen or heard herself.

It was a goodly show; "fifty hens at least, counting the roosters," as Fred said that evening at the supper-table, when he was describing the scene. But he didn't count them: who could? You might as well attempt to count the drops in a

shower as a crowd of feeding hens. It is almost as bad as counting the votes in a corrupt ward of a great city. The same specimen gets counted so many times! Now, if any three or four of these hens, taken at random, had been left at Fred's door by Farmer Green, he would have been perfectly satisfied. But, standing with the whole assortment before him, it was hard to choose; that is, it was hard to suit, at the same time, his taste, and the rather slender capital which he proposed to invest in the poultry-business. At one time it looked as if he would lay out his whole fortune in roosters, he was so much delighted with their fine feathers. And really one of them was worth a small fortune. The curve of that cock's neck was like the sweep of Niagara, a glorious flood of brown and yellow, of every possible shade and combination. He had a breastplate of steel chased with gold, finer than Bois Gilbert's. His wings seemed to scatter emeralds and sapphires and topazes every time he flapped them; and the rich flood of feathers that fell down his neck ran streaming over his back in amber currents. But the tail was the splendidest. Imagine a fountain of jet-black breaking into an emerald spray, and the wind catching the topmost shoot, and flinging it off like a double pennon in the air. Oh, he was a beauty! and when he shook his mighty head, and let his tallest tail-feather touch the ground, and

crowed, it seemed as if he were the Donnybrook Irishman himself, who went round at the fair trailing his coat-tail on the ground, and begging anybody that dared "jist to tread upon the tail of his coat." The boys were loud in admiration of this magnificent creature, and wanted to know how much would buy him. If their united capital had been sufficient, they would not have hesitated a minute. At least Fred would not: his eye for beauty was so much stronger than his eye for business. But this rooster was out of the question. He could not be bought, not even if the boys had been willing to take an inferior hen as his only companion. Fred would have been satisfied to take that rooster and old Whitey, and said so. But this bargain was soon knocked on the head. For the proposal was no sooner made, than a sudden terror seized all the hens; and amid fearful cries from the great-throated rooster, of "Hawk! hawk! run, run, r-r-un!" Molly dashed into the group, and carried Whitey off to a place of safety.

But Saturday is a busy day, boys. Farmer Green cannot wait all night for Fred and Jimmy to choose a pair of hens. So the young merchants decide at once upon a Number 2 rooster, and two hens to match. Jimmy chose a trim, compact little hen with a copple-crown, warranted to lay: and Fred a coal-black, long-necked,

long-legged pullet, which he imagined to be a bird of some rare breed, stolen away by gypsies, perhaps, from some royal coop, and dropped down among those common fowls.

"Never mind the string, Mr. Green: we can hold them," said the boys, as the struggling biddies were caught, and handed to them; "and you will be sure to bring the cock in on Monday."

"Yes: never you fear boys. Better keep a tight hold of those critters' drumsticks, or they'll be giving you leg-bail."

"Oh, we'll fix 'em!" said Fred, giving his long-legged crow an admonitory clutch, as she lay on one arm with her feet tightly clasped by the hand of the other. Another moment, and he would have lost her, as with a piercing shriek, and desperate flap of the wings, she started to free herself.

"Well, good luck to you, boys," said Farmer Green. "It'll be your loss, and not mine, if they get away from you. Hadn't you better wait till Monday, and let me bring 'em all together?"

"No." The boys would not hear of it. They must have the hens that night. Their coop was all ready for them, supper and all. They could not wait.

"Come again, boys," said Mrs. Green as she came to the door with broom in hand, pleasantly sweeping out the mud which they themselves had

brought in with their boots. "Molly, can't you ask the young gentlemen to come again?"

The shy little figure behind her mother, still holding Whitey in her arms, as if she were not safe till those horrid boys were gone, flushed very red at being thus appealed to, and with an indignant "No, I don't want 'em," vanished from sight.

"She thinks you want her tame chicken, boys," said Mrs. Green, laughing at Molly's fears, and apologizing for her rudeness. "She'll make friends with you another day."

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Green; thank you very much for the treat you gave us," said Fred. "Yes, thank you very much," added Jimmy.

"Oh, you're welcome, boys! Don't forget to come again, and come Saturday, mind."

"Thank you, thank you!" said both boys, and went down the path to the road which led to town, as happy as the king of Cochin China; or perhaps I ought to say, as happy as that king must be if he really has as many hens of that breed as he wants.

But how often it happens that the moment of purest happiness precedes immediately the moment of deepest distress! Just as the boys had gone by Stanley's, and were passing an open field enclosed by a stone wall, a troop of noisy children came rushing round the corner, shouting as if they were possessed. Both boys started, and so did both hens, who up to this time had been wonderfully

quiet. Jimmy held tight hold of Copple-crown, but poor Fred was not so fortunate. With a fearful cry that rung in Fred's ears like a watchman's rattle, the high-bred fowl he was carrying left his arms, and, mounting the stone-wall, disappeared in the field beyond, in much quicker time than it takes to tell the story.

The look of dismay that filled Fred's countenance when he saw fifty cents' worth of live stock going in the poetical way which his copy-book described, "Riches take to themselves wings," was a curious blending of the pitiful with the ludicrous. Even the sense of partnership in the loss could not keep Jimmy from laughing out aloud. "Go for her, quick," he cried. And Fred did go for her with all speed, mounting the wall as if, for the occasion, he were endowed with wings. Not a sight or sign of the creature could he discern. Where could she have gone? Up a tree? But he would have seen her. Down a hole? But hens can't burrow. Into the stone-wall? No, she was not a squirrel. Where, then?

Along the edge of the field there was a tangle of last year's grass mixed with weeds; and what was that black thing sticking up in the midst of them? A burnt log, I guess. An old hat, perhaps. "*I* guess a lost hen," said Fred, making a bold dash for it; and, seizing the struggling legs, he drew the frightened waif out of the hole, into

FRED GRANT.

"Like to see her do that again."—Page 49.

which, like an ostrich, she had thrust her head, and restored her to her place on his arm. "Who'll crow now?" said Fred as he climbed back into the road, and joined Jimmy. "Like to see her do that again."

"Like to see *you* do that again," said Jimmy.

And so the boys went on, fore-armed by this warning against the dangers of the way. Other children followed them, calling out after them, "Oh, ho, ho! got a hen, got a hen!"—"Little fools," said Fred. "Suppose they think that's funny." When they came to the bridge, the draw was up. "Just our luck," said Fred. I told you he would, boys. Then the captive hens had a great fright at the planing-mill. They seemed to think it was some mighty rooster screaming, "HAWKS! r-r-r-r-r-r-r-un," at the top of his lungs. But, this danger passed, it was safe going up Pine Street to Fred's yard. Their last peril was over when Mary Grant, who was playing on the sidewalk, opened the gate for them, and they passed in triumph to the coop.

"Shut the door! quick!" cried the boys, as they tossed their spry booty into the house prepared for its reception. A push of the lath-door, a turn of the button, and then, if Fred and Jimmy had possessed the power, I believe they would

have crowed like fifty roosters all at once. The deed was done. Two live hens were bought, transported, and delivered; and the firm of "F. Grant & Co., dealers in poultry live or dead, and eggs at retail or wholesale," was established.

CHAPTER IV.

BUBBLE, BURST, AND CO.

"BUT what about 'Bubble, Burst & Co.'? You have never told us about that," I hear my young reader say. Yes, I remember; and, if you will spare me a chapter for the subject, I will describe that great combination of which Fred Grant had been business partner and manager, exhibiter, prestigiator, and bright, particular star. You may imagine, from the variety of his offices, that this was no common enterprise in which Fred had embarked. Of course, it will be understood that "Bubble, Burst, & Co.," is only a blind name. It would never do to tell the real names of the boys who took part in it. In its day it was a novelty. Barnum has succeeded in almost doing something like it since. I wonder if he got his idea of the New-York Museum from this early effort of the Jeruh boys. The Boston Museum shall have the credit of almost equalling the great combination show of "Bubble," &c., before it rounded out into its full orb of beauty from the

pipe of Fred Grant and his partners. But our show was much more varied. See if it was not.

In the first place, there was a museum proper. That is to say, there was a pine-table in one corner of the barn-chamber of Charley Bubble, senior partner; and on that table there were bits of rock from very famous places. Plymouth Rock, of course, was there. Is there any spot in America where it is not? Bits of mica-schist from Mount Washington, warranted. Charley had picked it himself on a summer visit to the mountains. Agate from Lake Superior. A little mug of the yellow and white Niagara stone, looking strangely human among the ruder forms of nature. There was some dispute about admitting this into the collection of minerals. "Was it natural, or was it artificial?" that was the question. Of course it was both; but on the whole, as it was really rather less a mug than a stone, it was passed. But why linger on the pebbles of the shore, when the whole ocean is before you? Enough to say, there were quarts of rocks, and rocks of quartz, on this small table; and small slips of paper scattered among the specimens told their natural history. Sometimes the specimens changed places. Indeed, a gust of wind had scattered the slips far and wide, on the day before the first exhibition; and an uneasy doubt existed in the boys' minds, whether Plymouth Rock was Mount Washington,

or the agate was the quartz, or the mica was something else. But the mug they were sure of. Happy rock thus saved from Nature's indiscriminate marking, by the touch of man! The boys knew the Niagara mug, "any way."

On another table, near by, were treasures from the sea. Pieces of coral, shells from the Indies, a junk-bottle incrusted with shells (the sensible mollusks had contented themselves with the outside of the bottle: I wish men were as wise); some five-fingered jacks, baked to a turn in the warm sun; two or three horse-shoes, past service now; and a book of sea-mosses kindly loaned to the museum by Miss Alice Grant, sister of the junior partner. O creation! how shall I ever describe the specimens of thy three kingdoms, that were displayed in Charley Bubble's barn? Two small tables held them all; but a library of books would not contain all that might be said about them. One specimen more, and I shall have done. A stuffed owl was perched above the tables, looking as wise as if he knew all creation. That bird ought to have been a professor of natural science. His face would have atoned for all he did not know.

So much for the museum.

"Now take seats, gentlemen! Ladies, will you please be seated?" Two or three rough boards, very transiently lodging on casks and crickets of

unequal heights, a stray chair or two, and an upturned butter-tub, were the seating accommodations of the little theatre. At the command of a bell violently rung three times, the curtain, or, rather, the bocking, for that is what it was, slowly rose. Let me explain that the graceful bagging of the curtain in the centre was designed. At least, the bocking would do so; and the managers, not being able to change it, agreed that it was a very pretty effect, and let it bag. It certainly did not hurt the spectacle which was first exhibited, "A country scene." No! not acting, but a natural tableau; a miniature tableau. Very pretty it was too, and easily made by a boy of taste. Any board four feet square will do for a foundation, if you put a rim around it.

Then cover the board with earth, spreading it about, and making hills and valleys with it. Then get some nice green moss, and sod the whole over. Take sprigs of spruce, or any other evergreen, and stick them along the sides of the hills for forests. Get a bit of broken looking-glass for a lake. Put a glass duck or two on the lake. Never mind if the ducks are nearly as large as the lake: no danger of their getting drowned. Of course, you can find some wooden houses up garret, in the old crib where the cast-off playthings are stored: scatter them over the country. And, while you are about it, bring along some of those wooden

cattle that have survived the ark they used to live in. They will do to stock the pastures.

It was such a scene as this on which the visitors at Bubble's Theatre were asked to gaze, after the excitement of the exhibition of curiosities was over. To add to the naturalness of the spectacle, an ingenious boy, concealed behind the table, squeezed a specimen or two of that dry fungus which comes up in gardens in the spring, and made a cloud of smoke rise gracefully from behind the mimic forests. Put a blue curtain, with a round, illuminated hole in it for the sun, behind this stretch of field, wood, mountain, valley, and flood, and the effect isn't bad: at least, the managers thought so. "If only the blue curtain, which stood for the sky, wouldn't look green in the candle-light by which the scene was illuminated," as Charley Bubble said. But it would and did; and one malicious spectator drew attention to the green sky, in a whisper so loud that Fred, who was acting as showman before the curtain, heard it, and hastened to assure the audience that the sky was a real sky-blue, for his sister had matched it herself. "Took a piece of the sky to the shop with her, I suppose," muttered the critical spectator. "Guess she bought it in the evening; don't you, Smith?" For the credit of human nature, let me say that these ungenerous remarks were not liked by the audience, who

had come determined to be pleased; and their warm applause of the scene soothed Fred for the abuse of that "mean fellow Jones, who was always spoiling folks' fun."

"If anybody would like any thing to eat, cakes and lemonade can be purchased at the counter, between the acts." This was announced by Fred, just after the bocking had come down like "the blanket of the night," and hid the blushing face of the cambric sun in its sky of dazzling green. It was a happy hit, — having refreshments between the performances. The audience were sure to be hungry before another scene appeared. Can it be that these shrewd managers purposely delayed their scenes in order to dispose of their eatables at paying prices? They either did, or they did not: either way, they reaped the benefit of the arrangement. It is often so in business success. About as many men get rich by sheer clumsiness as by thrift and foresight. But only the latter kind know enough to keep their gains.

I really wish I could give my young readers a taste of those cakes. Norah had made them for Fred; and I tell you they had some snap in them. There was a glazing on them that would take the shine off any thing this side of the sun; and tiny sugar-plums, white, red, and yellow, clung all over the shiny side. Any one of them was worth a whole cent; and they could be bought for ten

pins each. Think of it! Only ten pins! and a cake that couldn't be beat, after it was baked, — it was well beat before, — by any confectioner on the street, not excepting Mrs. Peters herself; and everybody in Jeruh knew what cake she could make. There was only one drawback to these cakes: they would make the eater dry. But that was no misfortune, when lemonade like Bubble's could be bought for a small outlay of pins. If any wealthy patron of the company chose to settle in coin, cents were not refused. But pins would admit the bearer to all the sights and privileges of the mammoth show. And such were the attractions of these refreshing interludes, that many of the audience spent the last pin about them, to share the treat, and went home with their collars riding up their necks, and their sashes dragging disgracefully, for want of the pin that had gone to pay for cakes and ade.

"The Lion and the Traveller!" shouted Fred, in the midst of this feast.

"Tinkle, tink, tink! tinkle, tink, tink! tinkle, tinkle, tinkle!" went the bell, and slowly the heavy curtain rose to its full height. This time, however, the bag in the middle was really in the way; and it became necessary to arrange with the lion and the traveller a slight delay of proceeding, while the curtain was clewed to its supporting-beam. The lion, who was no other than Charley

Bubble himself, encased in a buffalo robe, was well on his way for the unhappy traveller, when the curtain rose. How to restrain his appetite, and keep up the ravenous character he had assumed, while the curtain was mending, might have troubled a more experienced actor than Charley pretended to be. But it is an ill wind that blows nobody good; and the poor traveller had none too much time, while the lion was chafing and roaring a yard off, — the stage would not allow of any greater distance, — to arrange his hat and coat upon his cane on the edge of the precipice, and retreat behind a tool-chest which stood for a rock. "All right!" cried Fred, as the knot was fastened which kept the middle of the curtain up. That lion must have understood English; for, at the word, he bounded at the figure before him, and went dashing down the precipice, at least three feet deep, into a bed of shavings which had been prepared to receive him. Then the traveller came from behind the tool-chest, in his shirt-sleeves, and without his hat, but perfectly safe otherwise, and was heartily received by the audience. But, strangely enough, the sympathies of the people seemed to go with the lion more strongly than the man; and they would not be satisfied until Charley Bubble appeared, no longer in the buffalo-robe, but in a round jacket with brass buttons, his customary dress, and bowed

to the deafening applause. "Did you hurt you, Charley?" cried his sister from the front seat. "Keep still, you little goose!" was the only answer she got, in a whisper that went farther than any shout would have gone. And so, after unclewing the bag, the curtain was let down.

But the friendly spectators had hardly recovered from their anxiety about the lion, when their attention was claimed for a new sensation. Master Frederic Grant, who had improved the time while the lion and the traveller were performing, to array himself in a dazzling costume, came tripping before the curtain in his new character of prestigiator. It is a long word for a short boy like Fred. Perhaps that was the reason Fred stood on his toes so airily, as if he were trying to lengthen himself out to match his big name. After balancing himself on the tips of his toes a while, as if he to were really sorry there was such a thing as floor stand upon, — a cloud, or air itself, being quite sufficient for his purposes, — Fred consented to stand down, like a sensible fellow, and begin his tricks. There was the string-trick. A double string was cut in two by one of the audience, in the sight of everybody; and then two ends were tied together, and the other two ends were shown all untied. The loose ends were put into Fred's mouth; and in less than a minute the string was taken out, and there was the string whole and complete, no tie

either, a real, strong, even cord just as it came from the shop. Oh, the triumph of that moment! When Fred looked up at the astonished audience, it seemed as if his eyes were saying, "Where is Alexander now? Does anybody know? He could cut a knot, but it takes *me* to tie it up again."

Then, with all the boldness of a highwayman, Fred demanded of one of the spectators, a pretty girl of eleven, her pocket-handkerchief. It was given without a word. Instantly it was thrown into a tin-box; alcohol was then thrown into the same box, and set on fire. A burnt mass of cotton was shown to the audience, and a shudder of indignation passed through the company. The pretty girl of eleven was just beginning to cry at the loss of her property, when, lo! from the same box came the handkerchief as good as ever, and Fred politely handed it to her in season to catch the first tear. The child was more than repaid for her trouble by finding in the handkerchief two sugar-hearts pinned together with a Cupid's arrow. What will this marvellous exhibitor do next? See, he is lighting half-a-dozen small candles, that stand upon the table! What funny little candles! And how queerly they burn! As I live, the man, I mean the boy, is going to swallow them, wicks and all! And, sure enough, Fred takes them, one after the other, and deliberately eats them all, looking up at the end, and saying, "Rather a *light*

supper." He learned that joke at Signor Donner's show, and the trick too. The candles were very good eating. They were made of apples cut to look like candles; a bit of almond was stuck into the top for the wick. The almond would burn long enough to keep up the character of a wick; and, for the matter of eating, everybody knows that burnt almonds are not to be despised.

"Tinkle, tinkle, tink!" went the bell, and off went Fred like the going-out of one of his candles. It was the signal for a new play. This time a real tragedy was on the stage. Capt. John Smith was stretched upon a green carpet: a big Indian, looking as if he had just stepped up from a tobacco-shop, where he had stood for a sign, was lifting a hatchet, in the act of killing him; but between Smith and his murderer was a "nearer one still, and a dearer one." That is to say, Pocahontas, the daughter of the chief, was leaning over the prostrate man in a protecting way, and shielding him from death. You might have heard a pin drop, if anybody in the audience had had one to drop, so intense was the interest. Amid the death-like silence, Capt. Smith murmured something to Pocahontas, which the audience could not quite make out. "What did he say? What was that?" one whispered to another. Nobody was sure; but a sharp-eared little girl in front reported that he told her to get her hair out of his eyes. I can

hardly think he would have been so ungrateful, and yet there are such brutes in the world. A sigh of relief passed around the room when the curtain went down instead of Powhatan's hatchet, and the scene was gone.

There is no tonic like excitement. Everybody was ravenous for food after this scene; and the appearance of a fresh plate of seed-cakes, and a new supply of lemonade, made the pinless audience eager to buy. Happy the boy or girl who had cents to fall back upon! There was lavish spending on their parts, and generous treats to their less fortunate companions. And thus the company were sustained between the tragedy of Capt. John Smith, and the next and last scene of this great combination show. It was already tea-time on Wednesday afternoon, and one or two of the older members of the audience were starting to go home; but, the manager assuring them that the last and best scene was almost ready, they consented to stay a few minutes longer.

"Hark! did you not hear it?" Yes, but it was a false alarm. Somebody had dropped the bell. Another interval of suspense, and hope deferred, and the real signal was given. Three times three it went, in a sort of musical hurrah; as if in celebration of patriotic valor. Slowly the curtain rose, and, having been adjusted, exposed to full view the harrowing spectacle of William Tell

shooting at an apple on the head of his innocent son. The haughty Gessler stood by, enjoying the sport. Bubble took the part of Tell, and Fred was the "pretty, harmless boy." He looked the character charmingly, holding up his head, on which a big Baldwin apple rested steadily, and looking into his father's face with a smiling confidence in his skill. There was no reason why he should not. The apple was only six inches from the end of the crossbow, and it seemed as if nothing could well be safer than the boy's head, under these circumstances. Fortunately, the stage would not allow any greater distance; but, if it had, Fred would not. He only consented to take the part of Tell's son on condition of having the archer at a perfectly safe nearness.

Under these conditions, even the audience felt no anxiety about the result. If the apple had been stuck on the end of the arrow, it could not have seemed a much surer thing than it did to mortal sight. But there's many a slip between other things than the cup and the lip; for instance, between an arrow, and an apple six inches off. And when the drawn bow twanged, and the arrow went, there was real surprise, and momentary terror, at the effect it produced upon young Tell. Rubbing his scalp, whence the Baldwin had fallen safely to the floor, the young hopeful began to address his father in any thing but com-

plimentary terms. He begged to know if he could hit an elephant a foot off, and asked what in time he meant by shooting the top of his head off? These inquiries, put in a grieved and indignant tone, and enforced by a drop of blood on Fred's forehead, made the elder Tell half mad and half sorry. He and Gessler instantly examined the wound together, in the most friendly manner; and, finding it only a slight scratch, tried to resume their former hatred, and looked daggers at each other. But it would not do. The tragedy was too real to be enjoyed. Fred left the stage, sulking and smarting a little from his scratch, and declaring that he would not play with such a "butter-fingers" as old Tell. Whereupon the stage-manager, with the assistance of Gessler and Tell, who kindly volunteered their services, let down the curtain for the last time, and the show was over. It was never repeated. The breach between the partners proved to be too wide to be healed. Fred insisted on a distribution of the proceeds that very night, and went home looking like a walking pincushion, with his jacket all shining with spoils, five cents in coppers in his pantaloons-pocket, and the remainder of Norah's seed-cakes wrapped in a piece of newspaper, and tucked under his arm. Poor young actor, showman, vender of ade and such, prestigiator shut up like a spyglass now, how clearly distant scenes

appear through your lengthened experience! and your future course is brought near in the brief history of "Bubble, Burst, & Co." Now you see why I gave the firm that name, boys.

CHAPTER V.

WAKING UP.

BUT that whole business described in the last chapter was a thing of the past. "When I was a child, I thought as a child," Fred might have truly said, in defence of this early venture. A growing boy learns something in three years, especially between ten and thirteen. And yet do boys learn so much at this period of their lives? I sometimes fear they grow more at this season in the conceit of knowledge than in knowledge itself. At any rate, Fred did not learn so much in these three years that he had nothing to learn afterwards. He awoke, on the morning after his successful purchase and transportation of the hens, with a confused sense that something pleasant had happened. He could not remember what it was. There was an unusual sound in his ears; something like an alarm-clock only half wound up, and running down in an irregular fashion; as Fred would have expressed it, "steady by jerks." "Bother take that clock!" thought Fred; "I

sha'n't get up yet." And, turning his pillow over to get at the cool side, he laid his head down again, and prepared to take another nap.

"Q-u-a-w-k! quawk! quawk! quawk! quawk! quawk!" went the alarm again. "Oh, bother! can't you stop that?" thought Fred, still only half awake. Somehow the pillow was not just right, after all; so he raised himself to double it up, when the third alarm sounded; and then the truth blazed in upon Fred's mind as brightly as the sun that was shining into his window with its rising beams.

That was no clock running down! Hath a clock legs? Hath it wings? Hath it plumage? Hath it a copple-crown? Can it leap stone-walls? Doth it eat corn? Doth it lay eggs? "No?" Well, then, it was no clock running down, but a hen running *up* and down, and chanting the praises of early rising. Fred knew it as soon as he was enough awake to know any thing. If he had had any doubt of it, one look from his window would have settled it. Fred was up and dressing in a moment. He took a look into the yard the first thing, and could easily see the two hens running to and fro in the coop. They seemed to be counting the laths, or the spaces between them. Fred could see them running up and down, and thrusting their bills through every opening, in the oddest way. Presently it dawned upon him that

they must be hungry. He remembered that they had eaten the supper he provided for them the evening before with a good appetite; and doubtless they were ready for their breakfast. One incident that took place the night before is too good to be lost. Just before going to bed, Fred had received permission from his father to take the close lantern, and go to the barn, for a good-night look at the hens. He turned the light full upon the rake-handle which he had put up for a roost; and, lo! no hens were there. It gave his heart a turn at first, not finding them. But, looking towards the nests, he saw two figures squatting just above them, which looked like hens. Only there was one fearful lack. What had become of their heads? Had some prowling cat, or thieving rat, got into the coop, and nipped them off? Before Fred could account for the terrible omission, *presto!* with a suddenness that astonished him rather more than the disappearance of the hens' heads, they were there again; and a note of alarm from Copple-crown showed that she, at least, had not lost her tongue. When Fred came back to the house, and told the amazing story, his father laughed as if it were a capital joke. Alice kindly explained that the hens' heads were under their wings.

"What for?" demanded Fred.

"Why, to keep them warm, I suppose," said Alice.

"Surely you didn't forget to provide the hens with nightcaps, Fred," said lazy Tom mockingly.

"Stop chaffing," said Fred: "the coop is as warm as toast, Alice."

"My boy," said Mr. Grant, who did not enjoy having his children tease one another, although they came honestly by the habit, "hens always sleep in that way."

That night, when Fred was in bed, and it was dark, and nobody could see, he tried the experiment of putting his head under his arm, or his arm over his head, and thought it immensely uncomfortable. Did hens really sleep in that way? Father said so, and he wasn't joking; well, he pitied them.

But, as I was saying, it occurred to Fred as he was dressing, that morning, that the hens might be hungry: so he hurried on his jacket and trousers, and, not stopping for a collar, ran down the back stairway to the side-door, and was out in the yard in a twinkling. "Hungry! I should say they were, rather!" Poor Copple-crown was making piteous attempts to reach a kernel of corn that had dropped just outside the coop, near enough to tempt her appetite, but too far to be reached. The other bird, the bird of high degree, — Fred afterwards decided that she was a pure Guilderland, — the bird that hid her head in a hole the day before, like an ostrich, was standing before

the empty breakfast-saucer, which had held the scanty supper of the night before, and looking very intently at it. She seemed to be measuring it, apparently with a view of giving another sign of her relationship to the bird of the desert. If Fred had not arrived as he did, I dare not say that he would ever have seen that breakfast-saucer again. Guilderland had about concluded to gobble it up. Fred rescued the saucer just in time, and, filling it heaping full with corn, put it back into the coop. He was standing, and enjoying the sight of the happy creatures taking their breakfast, although I regret to say that Copple-crown got more than her share, and pecked fiercely at her royal sister, whenever she came near the dish, when a voice behind him cried out, "Hallo, Fred!" It was Jimmy. "How ain't they, this morning"?

"All right!" said Fred.

"Oh, they ain't all right, ain't they? What's the matter?" answered Jimmy.

He liked to tease Fred. Everybody did, and it was simply because he was so easily teased. It takes two to make a tease. If a boy will not show that he is bothered, nobody will try to bother him. Remember that. Oh, yes! it is easy enough to say, "Remember that;" and easy enough to remember, except at the moment when you are teased. Fred always remembered it, but

always got teased, because he could not control his irritation. He was too happy, however, this morning, to resent Jimmy's catch.

"Ain't they *hunky*, Jimmy?" said Fred.

"Yes, they're that," said Jimmy, as if he knew what that was. He must have some other dictionary than mine. So the boys stood, and delighted their souls in live poultry and lively talk, for half an hour, until Norah came to the kitchen-door, and warned Fred that he had not brought home the beans. Sure enough! It was Sunday morning, and every family in Jeruh had baked beans for breakfast that morning. The boys both started at the summons, for both had the same errand at the baker's. Mr. Pharaoh baked for all the country round, and to his bakery the boys hurried. What a sight was there! Deep earthen pots, enough for forty, yes, for a hundred thieves, and quite big enough if the thieves were only small enough, stood on the great bake-house table; and oh the delicious odor! Talk about a thousand flowers! Give me the smell of a hundred bean-pots, — some bearing beans with their crown of striped pork; oh the crackling! oh the crispy, brown things on top! some running over with brown bread, that cracked across the upper surface like the rich land in spring; some holding the famous New-England Sunday pudding, with "a little Indian" in it, as the receipt says. And really it seemed as

if something as lively as a little Indian were bubbling up and down under the heaving crust, as the pudding came out of the fiery furnace. It was a scene like this which greeted the boys as they came into Mr. Pharaoh's bakery. But they did not stop to realize the feast of rich smells that was spread before them. They began at once to hunt for the particular pot of beans which belonged to them. They had marked it, the day before, with a curious sign. A picture of a hen, roughly drawn with chalk, was the device. That was the way people knew their property. Everybody chalked some sign or letter on his pot of beans, and in the morning the sign was still there. After long hunting, the beans of the Pratt and Grant families were recognized, and borne away in safety; and the boys reached home in good season.

They could hardly be late on Sunday morning. Mr. Grant and Mr. Pratt were hard-working men, and they liked to lie later on Sunday morning. They were never kept from church by it, however, as some people are. When the nine-o'clock bells rang out the warning to prepare for church, breakfast was well out of the way; and the boys had ample time for putting on their "Sunday-go-to-meeting" clothes. And, when the bells pealed forth again, Jimmy and Fred were both on the street, on their way to church. Not to the same church, however. One went to the North, and the other to

the South Church; and the creeds of these churches were not alike. The North was Trinitarian Congregational, and the South was Unitarian Congregational, and the churches were separated from each other by a broad street; but the people who worshipped in different houses, on one day in the week, lived together all the rest of the time, trusting, respecting, and loving one another. I like to remember that all real worship, the whole world around, makes one harmony in heaven; just as the bells in all the churches in Jeruh, as they rung out that Sunday morning, blended their voices in mid-air, and made one call to many worshippers. I never heard the chimes in a single steeple make such music as those Sunday bells of Jeruh, bringing north and south and east and west into musical accord.

It must be confessed that Fred's mind wandered a little on that Sunday morning.

His heart was with his treasure, and that was in a certain coop on Pine Street. Those birds so colored his thoughts that the very worship of the church was filled with them. When the choir *Oh'ed* that they had wings, Fred thought of the swift flight of his bird of high degree over the stone-wall, the day before. For all he could do, these images would come up before him. Sometimes they helped him. For when Dr. Blessum read the chapter which tells of Jesus lamenting

over Jerusalem, and saying, "How often would I have gathered thy children as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings," it made Fred feel the protecting love of Christ in a new way, to remember the snow-white hen he had seen at Farmer Green's, the day before, with her downy brood warmly tucked away under her feathers. "Did he really love the children of Jerusalem like that?" thought Fred: "how mean they must have been to kill him!" Fred did not think that he himself was just as mean, if he shut his heart against the loving appeal of Jesus. But it was something gained to get a better knowledge of the love of Christ. It helped to make the earnest exhortation of the minister, at the close of the sermon, really touch Fred, with the wish that he might do something to show his gratitude for such love.

There was barely time for dinner, and a running look over the day's lesson, between the morning-service and the afternoon Sunday-school. But Fred contrived to crowd in a visit to his pets. He found them in a sunny corner of the coop, apparently intent on burying themselves alive. There they were sprawling on the ground, and burrowing like moles. They would peck the earth with their bills, and then scratch the ground under them, throwing it into the air above them like young volcanoes. The sound of rattling corn,

however, seemed to call them back to life, if they really intended to bury themselves. They stood up, looking like feather-dusters that were the worse for wear, shook off a cloud of dust, and came running for their dinner, without the least regard to their toilets.

Fred did not know his Sunday-school lesson very well that afternoon. Worse still, he got into disgrace. His mind would run on the new business he had taken up. And, when the teacher asked him where the Holy Land was, he astonished the whole class, himself most of all, by saying, "In Cochin China." His blunder had one good effect. It made him so ashamed that he gave his whole mind to the remainder of the lesson, and was able, that evening, to tell the family at home something of Miss Speedwell's teaching. It was a custom at Mr. Grant's, after the tea, which came earlier on Sundays than on other days, to sit together, father, mother, and children, in the back-parlor, and sing hymns. The teaching of the day in church and Sunday school also came in for its share of comment; and it often happened that the fragments of good thought, which were gathered up in this way after the feast, were more than the original supply. It is always so with the bread which comes down from heaven. The more it is shared among many, the more there is of it.

The best service of the day was this family

meeting in the cosey back-parlor; and yet it depended on the ministry in church and Sunday school for its best life. Parents and children talked of the lessons of the day, and discussed with free, yet reverent speech, the teaching they had received. And, whenever their conversation led to differences of opinion, the beautiful hymns, sung by all to sweet, familiar tunes, made them of "one heart and one soul." What matter whether they were of one mind, or not?

If the church-service sowed the good seeds, it was the home-service which harrowed them in, and made them take root. The singing was home-made, and far more hearty than the choir's at the church, if it was not so artistic. Alice played the tunes, and sung the air; Mary took the second, with a sweet, true voice; Tom sustained the bass when it was easy; and Mr. Grant, who had sung in the choir in his youth, gave out the tenor with a voice that had gained in feeling, if it had lost something of its old-time freshness. Mrs. Grant never could sing in tune; but her religious sensibility made her keenly enjoy the Sunday-evening singing. She knew all the hymns by heart, and was always able to prompt the singers when they forgot a verse; and sometimes, in the warmth of her sympathy, she would give out the lost lines, in a thin, quavering voice that set the children laughing at mother's solo. Fred's voice, being un-

certain where it would locate, was only of service in a few simple tunes: but he gave promise of supplying a more active bass than Tom's in a few years. There was never any formality in this Sunday-evening singing. It came like the wind, and died away like the wind. The family met in the back-parlor, on that evening, by simple force of habit. And when all the standard hymns were sung, and each of the family had called for his favorite tune, the singing came to a close naturally. The piano sometimes sounded on after the songs were past, as Alice turned over the leaves of the hymn-book, and tried one or another. But she soon gave it up, and joined in the conversation which always followed. Mr. Grant did not take pains to shut out every-day subjects from this hallowed season. It would be hard to say why this intercourse between parents and children was so much more fruitful on Sunday evening than on any other. The topics of conversation were not so different, but there was a different tone.

On this particular Sunday which we are describing, Mr. Grant and his wife were very much concerned for a friend of theirs, who had been unfortunate in his business.

"Do you say he has lost every thing?" said Mrs. Grant.

"Yes, that is the talk down town. He trusted Leger to keep the books, and had such confidence

in him that he never suspected the scamp of stealing; but Leger made way with fifty thousand dollars, and then absconded."

"Cannot Leger be overtaken, and compelled to restore the money?"

"No: he has fled the country. There is no help for James but to lose every thing, and begin again; a hard task at his time of life."

"And what will Fanny and Arthur do?" said Alice, anxious for her young friends, the children of Mr. James Fairplay, the man her parents were speaking about.

"All they can to help their father bear his loss happily, I hope," said Mr. Grant.

"And dear Lydia," said Mrs. Grant, speaking of Mrs. Fairplay. "She will suffer most from her inability to help others. Only think how like a mother she was to Leger's children when their own mother died, and this is her — reward," Mrs. Grant was on the point of saying; but she checked the word, and said instead, "this is Leger's return for her kindness. Frederic, I am glad you have no partner."

"Yes, partnership is a hazardous thing. There must be perfect openness, a generous spirit, and a love of just dealing, in partners, if there is to be success or happiness in such a relation; but, for that matter, so must there be among all men who deal with one another. We are all partners,

whether we will, or not; and every dishonest man betrays some innocent partner, whether he goes by that name, or not."

"What was the trouble with Quarles, father?" said Tom. "The men at the counting-room were talking about it yesterday."

"Oh, that was another matter!" said Mr. Grant. "Quarles had no dishonest intention, but he was wrong: he did not stand by the terms of his partnership. Partners ought to make their agreement plain at the start, and then stand by it."

"But they said Quarles had tried to get out of the business a year ago," said Tom.

"Very likely; but that is no excuse for acting contrary to agreement while the compact stands," said Mr. Grant. "A man can't release himself from obligations to other men: they must release him. Quarles had no right to go against his partner's wishes."

There was more talk on these and other subjects that night; and, without knowing it, Mr. and Mrs. Grant had really impressed upon their children lessons that would color their whole lives. We shall see how one young boy, who sat in the corner of the sofa that evening, took in the lesson on "partnerships." It came home to him; for was not he already a partner in the firm of "F. Grant & Co., Poulterers"?

CHAPTER VI.

BUSINESS IN FULL FEATHER.

WHETHER or not "a watched pot never boils," may be questioned; but it admits of no question that a watched hen never lays. Fred and Jimmy had to learn this by a hard experience of hope deferred. For the first week, school-hours excepted, there was scarcely a minute that the boys were not posted near the coop, eying their captives with all the intentness of a detective. Stealing a nest under these circumstances was out of the question, even if any nest in that close coop had been worth stealing. The boys meant no harm: they watched their hens out of the fulness of their interest in them. Still there was a natural desire to get something besides cackle, in return for the corn and shorts which were daily lavished upon them. And when, in their restless cruising, the hens approached the nests Fred had made for them, an eager hope that "they might enter, and possess the land," made the boys' hearts beat quick with expectation. In-

deed, I am not sure but Fred had some hope, at last, that his prolonged gaze might mesmerize the unwilling biddies, and make them obedient to his will; in which case they would of necessity have gone at once to their nests. But Copple-crown and Guilderland were not good subjects for such influence; and, with all the watching and wishing, nothing came to encourage the young merchants in their hope of profits. Thus the first week went slowly by, and nothing happened. There was outlay enough. The amount of grain those hens consumed would have kept a pair of oxen, I believe. And the boys' fathers were in danger of financial ruin, if this state of things continued much longer.

"But the longest lane has a turn," they say; and on the tenth day, to the unspeakable delight of Fred, who made the discovery on his thirteenth visit to the nest on that day, there was found, close beside the porcelain sham that served as a decoy, a real, original, *bona-fide* egg. Guilderland was stepping around the inner coop, at the time of Fred's visit, as proud and confident as Queen Mary; and her consort beyond the wall (of course you know Farmer Green brought the rooster all right) was chanting in lively response to her triumphant song. It was evident to Fred which hen had laid that egg: and it was highly satisfactory to believe that his own noble bird had

brought this blessing to the coop. In the joy of his young heart, he could have hugged Guilderland, but the hen declined the honor; remembering, perhaps, her former experience in Fred's arms. Finding himself rebuffed in this direction, Fred turned to the house, egg in hand, to receive the congratulations of the family. But nobody was at home except Norah, who was "shure" she was glad to hear it. "A good stout one, too, for a firster," she said; "and indade she hoped it wouldn't be the last of the loike."

"Of course not," said Fred. "Who ever heard of a litter of one egg?"

"Norah is just so ignorant," thought Fred, and ran off to find Jimmy, whose satisfaction, he knew, would be as great as his own. He found his partner in his father's shed, hard at work chopping wood. The expenses of the poultry-business had wholly exhausted his savings; and it was necessary for him to earn more money, or fall in debt. He left his hatchet where it fell, in the heart of a tough knot, as Fred entered with the longed-for prize: and for a few moments Jimmy was all eyes, until he had taken in the size, the shape, the creamy white, and the perfect finish, of the wondrous egg. Both boys agreed that it was a remarkable specimen, larger and finer every way than any they had ever seen before.

"How much does it weigh?" asked Jimmy.

Fred could only guess. He had not weighed it; but he was bold to guess that it weighed fully half a pound.

"Copple-crown's, of course," said Jimmy.

"Not a bit of it!" and Fred described the cackling of Guilderland, and her loud claim upon her owner's belief.

"Pooh! she's always *quawking*, especially if anybody goes into the coop," said Jimmy. "I know it was Copple-crown."

"I know it wasn't. You can come and see," said Fred.

How he supposed Jimmy was to settle the question by a visit to the coop at this late hour, did not appear. But this controversy showed where the break must come some day. Instead of holding their stock in common, each boy held exclusive ownership in one hen, and a common interest in the rooster. The very first product of the coop thus became an apple of discord; and the selfishness of human nature, undisciplined by experience, seemed likely soon to break the shell of their agreement. Alas! "All the king's horses, and all the king's men, could never pick Humpty-Dumpty up again."

Fred kept the egg, "possession being nine points of the law;" and on his return to his house, the whole family being assembled around the supper-table, he argued the question of owner-

ship with all the eagerness of youthful greed, unhampered by the restraints of far-sighted judgment.

"Of course it's mine, because my hen laid it."

How did he know?

"Because Guilderland said so as plain as a hen could speak."

"But, Fred," said his father, "when you go into partnership, you must hold all the stock in common, and share all the profits, according to agreement."

"Oh! but I never agreed to give Jimmy my hen's eggs."

"But suppose it should turn out to be Copplecrown's, what then? Is Jimmy to have all that his hen gives?"

Fred had not considered that. He thought it time enough to arrange that when it happened. He knew that was Guilderland's egg.

It was no more than fair that he should have it, any way. Had not his father furnished the coop? And how much of the cost of keeping, and the trouble of feeding, came upon the Grants? Every thing Fred had done for the hens was made the most of; and Jimmy's contributions of labor, money, and help were counted at their least valuation.

"Besides, I want to give this egg to Miss Pleasant. I said I would, father. You know, I promised her the first egg because she was so good about having me keep hens. I think she ought to have it. I sha'n't give it up, any way."

Mr. Grant saw that Fred was not calm enough to think justly, or reason fairly, on the subject at that moment: so he only advised him to wait a few days, and see if he did not get more eggs. It would then be easier to arrange a just division, especially if it were discovered that Fred's hen was not the layer after all.

But the next day brought no relief: no second egg appeared on that day, nor yet on the day after; and again the Grant family found itself in session around the supper-table as a sort of informal board of arbitration between the contending partners. The property had only risen in value by the failure of another egg to appear; and Fred was more determined than ever not to part with that *one* anyway. Indeed, it was a difficult thing to settle. Even Mr. Grant was puzzled to know how to divide an egg. If it had only been an apple, now, or a pie, or a pickled-lime, or a stick of candy, how easily the trouble might have been relieved! but it would have beaten Solomon to dispense justice on this occasion. If he had ordered the egg to be cut in two, neither Fred nor Jimmy could have proved ownership by any instinctive agony. Besides, who could cut an egg in two? Tom suggested, with provoking cold-bloodedness, that the egg be boiled hard, and then halved, each partner taking his half. He might have remembered that Fred could not bear a hard-boiled egg.

"Toss up a copper, then," said Tom, "or the egg itself: big end, I win; little end, you lose; hey, Fred?"

"That's all you know!" was the only reply Fred dared to allow himself.

"Why not invite Jimmy to breakfast with you to-morrow morning?" said Mrs. Grant. "And I will get Norah to cook the egg any way you like best. Then you can dispose of it together."

No, that would not do: Fred's mind was set upon giving it to Miss Pleasant. He didn't want it himself, oh, no!

"Well, then," said Mr. Grant, "why don't you and Jimmy unite in the gift, — both go over, and present it to Miss Pleasant, with best wishes for a good appetite?"

No, Jimmy would not agree to that. He wanted to keep the egg as a curiosity: he meant to blow it, and put the shell in his cabinet.

"Never mind, Fred," said good-natured Alice. "Let Jimmy have it. What's an egg? I will get you a dozen fresh ones from Farmer Green, when he comes to town again, and you can give them all to Miss Pleasant."

But no. Alice lost any hold she might have had on Fred's mind, by her giddy question, "What's an egg?" as though that were a common specimen, or as if the only thing involved in the controversy were a hen's egg. Right, jus-

tice, liberty, religion, all the things in the Constitution, were at stake. Suppose the fathers had said, "What's a cup of tea?" we might have been drinking the condemnation of colonial slavery to the present hour.

"Very well, Fred, then you must wait a little longer," said his father. "They used to say, 'One berry never grows alone,' when I went berrying. There must be more eggs where there's one. Wait a little longer."

And Fred did wait four days, five days, six days, a whole week; and Norah's foolish hope that that egg might not be "the last of the loike of it," began to seem like a prophecy.

"I won't wait another day," Fred declared on the evening of the seventh day. "It will be as old as Methuselah before Miss Pleasant gets it, at this rate. I mean to carry it over to-morrow, any way."

Norah was bringing in a plate of delicious rice griddle-cakes, when Fred made this announcement. She set them down as if the plate were hot, and went back to the kitchen with a queer wrinkle in her face, which looked as if it would have been a broad grin if it had dared to. What in the world should she do? Master Fred would certainly carry the thing to Miss Pleasant to-morrow, and no mistake. The poor sick lady might eat it, out of the "swateness of her heart, jist to

be able to thank Fred;" and what if it should turn out a bad egg, after all?

"Only a week old," do you say? "what chance for it to be bad?"

Oh! but you don't know all that Norah does about this matter. The good-natured girl meant no harm. She had seen Master Fred getting thin with watching and longing for something, and she thought it might cheer him up to find an egg in the nest; and so she had taken one out of the cupboard, and laid it by the side of the crockery nest-egg. And that was what Norah knew, and what nobody else knew at that moment.

Should she tell Fred? It would be a pity to disappoint the boy, "shure." But what if the egg were not good? He might hear of that in some way. Miss Pleasant might let Mrs. Grant know, and the secret would come out somehow. Besides, Norah had the best of reasons for believing in the worthlessness of that particular egg. It swam like a duck, when she tried it with others in a dish of water. The "unnatural cratur, to swim afore it was hatched," said Norah to herself, "and it a hen's egg too!" She was morally certain that it was addled. Oh, if it should get broken in Fred's hand, and the secret come out! But even that would be better than for poor, dear Miss Pleasant to be made the victim of this treacherous compliment. Norah decided that she must tell

Mrs. Grant. That evening after tea she told her story, with such hearty sorrow for the unhappy consequences of her good-natured deception, that her mistress could not find it in her heart to chide her. Indeed, I think Mrs. Grant rather enjoyed the joke herself. When she told her husband that evening, after the children had gone to bed, Mr. Grant laughed enough to raise the house. "How shall we manage?" said Mrs. Grant. "It will never do to let Fred take that dreadful thing to Miss Pleasant. Shall we tell him the fact?"

"Yes, I think so," said Mr. Grant. "It will do him no harm. He has not behaved generously in the affair. It may make him ashamed of his meanness. Better tell him."

The next morning, as Fred was hurrying to make his visit to Miss Pleasant before school-time, Mrs. Grant said, "Fred, have you ever tried that egg in water, to see if it is sound?"

"What nonsense, mother!" said Fred. "Who ever heard of an egg spoiling in a week?"

"But perhaps that has had a longer time to spoil. Don't be vexed with Norah, Fred. The truth is, she saw that you were anxious to find an egg in the nest, and so she put one there. She meant it kindly. But she thinks it may not be good, because it floated when she tried it."

If Norah's face was a puzzle last night, — a sort of cross between a smile and a cry, inclining to a

broad grin, — Fred's face this morning was equally dubious. I think the tendency to cry was rather stronger than the other, however. But he didn't cry, not he. The Spartan boy with the stolen fox under his apron was not more brave than Fred.

There were two striking things, one of which he did. and the other he did not do. He did not go to Miss Pleasant's. He did go straight over to Jimmy's, and tell him how they had been fooled. You ought to have heard Jimmy's laugh, and Fred's too. There was a duet of laughing. No settlement of their quarrel could have been more thorough. They were both rather ashamed of themselves down deep in their hearts. But shame is a good thing when boys have done a mean thing, and it is easier to bear when two are ashamed together.

"I guess you were right, Fred, about that egg," said Jimmy, his eyes brimful of quiet fun. "I guess Guilderland did lay it."

"I guess not."

"What shall we do with it, Fred?" said Jimmy. "Smash it?"

"Phew!"

"Well, then, throw it overboard?"

"Won't sink!"

"Bury it?"

"We will."

CHAPTER VII.

VACATION.

ONE day, about three months after the conversation which closed the last chapter, there was an unusual uproar in Pine Street. Fred and Jimmy were there looking hot and excited; and all the boys of the neighborhood were swarming around the corner like bees. I suppose my reader thinks he knows what was the matter: the hens had got out of their coop, and were loose in the street. No: the hens were safe enough, but the children had broken loose. It was the last day of school; and the clamor of the children, loud enough on any day after three hours' bottling, was like an explosion of nitro-glycerine on this last day of school. No more lessons for four weeks, — blissful thought! A whole month of vacation! "Six weeks in August" was facetiously given, in those days, as the length of the summer vacation. What fun! The boys were hugging their books and slates and atlases in their arms as if they loved them. They did not.

They were taking them home as in duty bound. But it was like taking care of your neighbor's baby: you do not dare to drop him, but are perfectly willing to give him into responsible hands. The air was full of eager voices saying "Good-by!" and asking "Where you going?" "How long you going to stay?" "Ain't it jolly, I tell you!"

Jimmy and Fred stopped a few minutes by Mr. Grant's gate, resting their pile of books upon the fence, and talked of the great event. "When shall you go?" asked Jimmy.

"Not before Wednesday. Mother says Norah must have Monday and Tuesday to get my clothes ready. Do you go earlier?"

"No: I have some jobs to finish first. I must chop a pile of wood for spending-money, and then I must find somebody to take care of my chickens."

"Father and Norah will take care of mine," said Fred. "They will do."

"Suppose we go together, then, on Wednesday in the morning train," said Jimmy. "I think I can be ready."

"All right: we will."

I will tell you, by and by, where the boys were going; but I must stop here to explain the boys' talk about the chickens. Anybody would think, from their talk, that Fred and Jimmy were not in

partnership. Anybody who thought so would think about right. The firm of F. Grant & Co. was no more. At least, that particular partnership was over, although the name remained with other partners. In the three months just gone by, Jimmy had withdrawn with Copple-crown, and thirty-seven and a half cents, his share of the rooster; and Fred had taken his father into the business, and enlarged his stock. Mr. Grant had to pay handsomely for his admittance to the firm. The business having been established, the honor was greater than at first; and it is generally supposed, in such cases, the risks would be less. To be sure, old firms sometimes take in new men for the very purpose of saving themselves alive; and the new partners find out, to their cost, that they have bought a thistle for a rose.

If Fred's business needed strengthening, it was certainly not on account of the weakness of age. But Mr. Grant was a willing victim. He made liberal advances of corn and money, out of the sincerity of his interest in the hens; and at the time we have now reached, Aug. 1, 1849, there were at least a dozen hens in Fred's coop, and three broods of chickens scratching up the back-yard.

Poor Jimmy was not so prosperous. His father's premises offered no such paradise for hens; and his father had not taken the fever as Mr. Grant

had. Jimmy would have retired from the business altogether, when he left the firm of "F. Grant & Co.," had it not been that Copple-crown, at that very time, wanted desperately to set. All her feathers seemed to grow the wrong way; and she did nothing but cluck and fret, as if she imagined herself surrounded by chickens that must be taken care of. She had laid a full litter of eggs by this time, and fairly earned her right to a young family; and Jimmy could not bear to lose the opportunity of having a brood of chickens, all his own. It happened that there was a dreary, triangular yard at Mr. Pratt's shop, surrounded by high walls, one of those waste bits that get cooped up, of necessity, in building a city; and Jimmy got permission to use this for his purpose. So he took Copple-crown from the nest one day, at the peril of his eyes, — the poor thing not knowing what happiness was in store for her, — and carried her in a covered basket to the shop. There, in a quiet corner of the desolate back-yard, Copple-crown found a nest with thirteen eggs in it, and a dish of corn, and pan of water, close beside it. Prison life and prison fare! and yet, with three weeks of loneliness and wearisome setting before her, this hen was happier than if she had been running at large in the green meadows, eating the fat of the land. Is it not wonderful, — this motherly instinct? We reverence it in woman,

and call it the love of mother for her offspring. And why shouldn't we revere it in the poor hen, and give her credit for self-sacrifice? I doubt if Jimmy thought it out in any such way as this, but he certainly treated Copple-crown as kindly and thoughtfully as if he had. And, during the tedious weeks of her setting, she never lacked for care. Jimmy never forgot her corn and water; and sometimes brought her fresh grass and angle-worms to comfort her heart.

You would like to know, perhaps, exactly how Fred and Jimmy came to dissolve partnership. Well, it is hard to tell what did it. There was no one great quarrel bringing about a crash. Norah's joke had given them an early shame of their greediness. In due time some eggs were laid, and they were equally shared. But it was not a paying business for either of the boys. Every egg cost them as much as a dozen at the store, and really there was very little difference between them in size or value. Jimmy's hard-earned money began to weigh heavily against the small return of eggs; and he was glad to be released, at length, from such an expensive interest. I do not mean to say that there was no dispute between the boys, after the great debate about the first egg. On the contrary, there were many. When Fred wanted to increase the stock, Jimmy had no more money to spend. It would be awkward if Fred

had more hens than Jimmy. How would they ever adjust their claims in that case, when it was already so difficult? After much arguing, they finally agreed to purchase together a *laying*-hen to try the force of example. Miss Pleasant had once borrowed a singing-bird, to encourage her canary to sing. Why not get a laying-hen on the same principle? Copple-crown and Guilderland, insensible to their owners' wishes, might be open to the influence of emulation. So the boys paid another visit to Farmer Green's, on another Saturday afternoon. Mrs. Green was as glad to see them as before, and treated them with nimble-cake. Molly was just as shy as ever, and not at all pleased when she knew they were after a laying hen; for her Whitey was laying at that very time.

"Like to see them get her, though," she thought to herself, and ran off to give Whitey warning.

Farmer Green was very good about it, — "real sorry the hens had not done better;" and promised to bring them a real layer soon, which he did the next week.

Then there was the dispute about the chickens. Of course they must have some chickens; but who should furnish the eggs? who buy the setting-hen? And, when hatched, whose should the chickens be? Even if they shared the expense equally, how could they manage with an odd

number of chickens? There was as great debate over these matters by the hencoop of "F. Grant & Co.," as ever there was in Reuben among the sheep-troughs in old time, ay, and the same searching of hearts; for, in their way, the trials of boys are just as hard to bear as the trials and temptations of men. Indeed, they are the same trials on a different plane of life. Always and everywhere, it is the one conflict between selfishness and love; and these boys were fighting the same battle which would engage them as men.

Some people may think it irreverent to compare boys' quarrels with those of Bible men and women; but I cannot see why, if Bible men and women really quarrelled like boys. And, if Fred and Jimmy had come out of their temptation better than Reuben did, I should say they were the better boys. But I dare not say that they did. Selfishness, and love of ease, got the better of both; and the old partnership of the sons of Jacob dissolved in the same way that our modern partnerships go.

But there is one reason why we might expect better things of ourselves and our children. We live after Christ, and after eighteen hundred years of Christian culture. That ought to make men better.

"Why is it," some boy may ask, "that Fred did not remember the lesson he learned, that

Sunday evening, about the duties of partners? I thought you said it sunk into his heart."

Well, it did; but generous characters are not made in a day, nor do all good seeds come to maturity in a month. Give Fred time enough, and see if he does not show that he has the making of a fair and generous man yet. I believe that that Sunday-evening lesson will bring forth fruit yet; for I have noticed that boys and men both learn their lessons in the same way. First they hear a good word, and say "Amen" to it, and think they will surely remember it; and afterwards, when the time for action comes, they act just as if they had never heard the good word. Every thing is so different, that they do not see at first that here is the place to do what they said they would. They find out their error too late to make that action right; but, in the experience of shame and sorrow at their sin, they resolve anew that they will do better next time. Thus they learn their lesson over again, and this time they learn it from life itself, which is the best preacher. When temptation comes again, they are better prepared for it. And I know many a man and boy succeeds at length where he failed at first, and turns out well, after all.

I shall not give Fred up, because he has proved such a touchy and stingy partner in his early trades. Read on, and see if he does not do better

one of these days. The boys are going to Berrytown to spend their vacation together.

Berrytown is as pretty a country town as there is anywhere. I do not mean that the town itself is pretty: that is only a cheaply-built village, like any one of a hundred in Eastern Massachusetts. But the country, — the farms, the places where the cows and pigs and horses and hens and oxen and sheep live, and where there is a snug old house with one story and an attic; and a big elm before the front-door, like an umbrella in the rain, and a sunshade in the warm August noon; and a big black barn, and a little shoemaker's shop; and every vegetable that grows in the kitchen-garden, with a patch of saffron in one corner, in case of sickness (but there never is any to speak of), and — and Aunty Patch, and Prince, her grown-up son, to carry on the farm, — oh! these are the places, or, rather, this is the place, for boys in their summer vacation. Some sensible people in Jeruh thought so, and their boys agreed with them; and every summer a dozen boys went to this earthly paradise, and you had better believe they had good times.

I shall never make anybody see this place as it was. The little description I have written looks no more like it than the picture Fred once sent home to his mother, drawn by himself. It is easy enough to write "elm-tree," or to draw some-

thing scrawly, as Fred did in his letter. If you write "This is a tree," under it, your mother, at least, will be kind enough to see the resemblance. But how can any such drawing give an idea of the strength and grace of that tree? The great trunk was braced, like a derrick, with strong roots, that ran away into the ground like ropes. It had more arms than ever Briareus had, and needed them too. You would have said so, if you had heard it wrestling with the wind on stormy nights. As for its hands and fingers, who could count them? or who could tell how tenderly they held the hangbird's nest; and how, like a benediction, they stretched above the old farmhouse?

"Most as good as Parson Spring's," Mercy Wheeler said. Mercy and Truth were two aged sisters, who lived opposite Aunty Patch's, and whose poor little brown cottage came in for its share of the great tree's protection.

Fred's first sketch of the house to which the tree belonged would give the idea that it was built on a side-hill, and followed the pitch of the land. A very slanting line showed where the roof began; and a tolerably straight line showed where it ended. The windows looked like the gratings of a State's prison, on which the prisoners had tried their skill at twisting; and the chimney was as flat as a signboard. But, for all that, the sketch showed that there were four windows in the

front of the house, and a front-door in the middle; that, in place of a second story, it was all roof outside, and attic within; that one big chimney cleared the whole house of smoke and bad air; and, if Mrs. Grant wanted to know any thing more about the house, Fred wrote that she must come and see it. I cannot invite my reader to do the same. Alas, I should scarcely dare to go there myself to-day! Almost thirty years have flown since Fred and Jimmy went to spend their summer vacation there. Thirty years bring great changes.

But I can tell you about that summer vacation at Berrytown, for I was there. Fred and Jimmy and I went down in the same train. I remember it as well as if it were but yesterday. Mr. Grant was having Fred's valise and Jimmy's bag marked for Berrytown, when I met them in the depot at Jeruh, that morning in August. Three happier boys than we were you never saw. Dissolving partnerships had not broken friendships between Fred and Jimmy. That was sure. All the way down, they were comparing notes as to their outfit for the summer's sports. And, whatever one had, the other was sure to have his share in it.

Had Fred remembered to bring his fishing-tackle?

Of course he had: he would as soon have left his head behind. Catch him going to Aunty

Patch's, where the Indian River ran within half a mile of the house, without his lines. Fred was caught several times, that summer, on or about Indian River, with lines and hooks and bait, and no sign of a fish. But there was no disgrace in that. He did his part. If the fish wouldn't bite, it was no fault of his.

"Your net, Jimmy! We shall want that to catch bait with. Did you bring it?"

"No! Couldn't pack it."

"Oh, that's too bad!"

"Never mind: take worms."

"Oh, but the pickerel don't care for worms!"

"Try a bit of frog."

"Oh, yes! but first catch your frog," said Fred. "How about knives, Jimmy? I've got a regular jack, stout enough to cut down the big elm."

"Better not try it," said Jimmy. "My knife will cut a birch: that's all I want."

"Better not try it," answered Fred. "Birch sticks are too handy about house."

"When there are a dozen boys in it, I should think," said Jimmy. "Won't Aunty have her hands full?"

"Yes; and Prince too. But he can't keep us off the hay. I don't care for Prince. He only makes believe mad."

"Better not vex him," said Jimmy, "or he won't take you down to *mash*."

"Won't take me, any way," said Fred: "he always takes the big fellows, because they can work. I wonder if he *would* take me, if I helped him about the farm, as Matt Ward does."

"Don't know; better try."

"Bu-r-r-r-r-r-t-o-n! Bur-r-r-r-r-r-t-o-n!" It would have puzzled the Webster who made the dictionary to know what the conductor said. But the boys knew well enough; indeed, if he had said Jerusalem, it would not have deceived them. There was no mistaking the place, especially as there was Prince with Black Bessie and the milk-cart, waiting for them by the depot; and old Charlie, the farm-dog, wagging his tail, or, rather, his whole body, at the train, as if he knew everybody in the cars.

Berrytown Station was nothing more nor less than an old country-house, which had been overtaken by the railroad, and caught before it had a chance to run away, as it would have been so glad to do if it could. Oh, how these good old houses must ache in all their timbers, if they have any feelings at all, to have a screaming, brazen-faced, dirty, smoking engine come running up to the back-door, frightening the hens and pigs and every thing, and bringing car-loads of impudent people close up to the pantry-window! Farmer Rustaway, whose farm had been cut in two by the railroad, and whose house was thus invaded, made

a virtue of necessity, and accepted an offer from the company to turn a portion of his house into a station for travellers. So the best parlor was made a reception-room, and Aunt Dolly's bedroom just behind it became the ticket-office. John Rustaway, a fine young fellow of twenty, was ticket-master and baggage-master too ; that is to say, he got the pay of both positions, and did both sets of duties as well as he could. I am afraid Rustaway soon became reconciled to the change, which brought him some profit in money, and a chance for John in life ; but I would rather have taken John's chance on the old farm. There was one member of the family, however, who never got reconciled to the cars during the brief remainder of her life. Aunt Dolly hovered about the back-door step on each arrival of the train, like a hornet driven from her nest ; and, if her two poor old teeth would have stood it, I believe she would have bitten that engine.

But all this was several years earlier than the day I am describing. There was no Aunt Dolly visible when Fred and Jimmy landed at Berrytown Station. John Rustaway was there still, looking redder than his amount of business required. I'm afraid the railroad brought him no great good, after all. He took the boys' baggage from the train, and put it carefully on the platform. This was in the early days of railroads, before it was discovered that every thing which was not smashed by accident on

the track must be broken on purpose by the baggage-men at the landing.

Fred and Jimmy secured their luggage, and, with the help of Prince, were soon aboard the milk-cart, and on their way to paradise, *alias* Aunty Patch's.

"Get up, Bessie!" "How fat she's grown, Prince! guess you don't work her much. Wish you'd let me drive; won't you, Prince? Shall I touch her with the whip? Had your cart new painted, haven't you? Splendid! How many cows you got this year? Any calves? Any thing new? You don't really mean that there's a colt? Is she black, like Bessie?"

It was hard to tell which went faster, the boys' tongues, or Black Bess when the whip touched her; but at other times, when the whip did not touch her, there was no doubt at all that the tongues got ahead.

"Hurrah! there's the old beauty; don't you see the big tree, Jimmy?" cried Fred, as the top of the elm rose to view.

"Yes, and there's—there's the chimney. I got the first sight of the house, Fred."

"And there's the front-door, and there's Aunty," cried Fred. "Got you there, Jimmy. I saw Aunty first."

I believe it was really farther from that point on the road where Fred said this, to the front door

of Aunty Patch's house, than — I was going to say, than all the rest of the way they had travelled. And yet it only took two minutes to make that distance, and Bess had been half an hour on the road before.

"Whoa, Bess! Be still, Charlie, still, sir! There, boys, jump."

"How dy'e do, aunty?"

"How are you, boys? Why, Fred, what a man you've grown to be! and Jimmy too. Mercy on me! you boys will eat me out of house and home. A good round dozen of you; all here now. Well, you're all welcome; heartily welcome! Have a doughnut, boys. Better not eat too much luncheon: dinner'll be ready soon. There, Prince, help the boys up stairs with their baggage."

And so, amid greetings and counter-greetings that fairly drowned the cackling of the hens (by the way, the hens were in a great state of excitement that morning: I wonder if they knew what great friends of theirs had arrived), the boys were received.

"What has become of all the fellows?" asked Fred, between the fourth and fifth bite of his doughnut.

"Oh, they're up to some mischief, I'll warrant!" said Aunty.

She was safe in saying that. But it would take a whole chapter to tell what that mischief was. What would you give to know, boys?

CHAPTER VIII.

BERRYTOWN.

WHATEVER mischief was on foot, that morning, nobody would know about it before dinner-time. The boys had vanished; and Aunty Patch was not certain whether they had gone to the river or the hill. Fred and Jimmy had enough to do for one morning, to set their traps in order, and look about the yard and barn. There was the big bedroom, which took exactly half the attic, finished off with plastering, and papered with green roses on a buff background. In each of its four corners was a double bed. Three or four chairs and wash-stands made up the remainder of the furniture. There was a small mantle-piece with nothing on it; a fireboard adorned with a marvellous picture of a bird that combined all the beauties of the peacock and the bird of paradise, surrounded by flowers of equally dazzling tints. The only picture on the wall was a cheaply-colored print of Washington entering Trenton under a famous archway, with

girls in white throwing roses under his horse's feet. This picture, being without glass, was allowed to remain in the room. One large closet, furnished with a double row of nails, received such clothing as needed to be hung up. A big bureau in the adjoining attic held some of the Sunday clothing; and the bags and valises around the room kept the rest. The boys found all the best nails taken, of course. First come, first served. But Aunty Patch made them comfortable with the loan of a little closet in the back room. On the whole, nothing could well be more snug and cosey than the old house, when it was really full. Eight boys in the front attic; four down stairs; Aunty in her back-parlor bedroom; Prince in his snuggery off the kitchen; the hired man over the shed; Charlie on his mat at the back-door. I call that a perfect fit, as the shoeman says, when he has worried your foot into his new shoe.

"Eight boys in one room!" said fine Mrs. Rich, when she first came down to Berrytown to see how her dear Jerome was faring. "Oh! my boy can never endure that. He has his own sleeping-apartment at home, with bath-room close by, and every modern convenience. Romey never can put up with this."

But Romey wished his fine mother had let him alone; for this attic bedroom was the very privilege

he most desired to enjoy. Aunty Patch had put him down stairs with only one room-fellow; and it was simple agony to the boys below to hear the fun that was going on up stairs, nearly every night, and they not in it. It really seemed as if the beds themselves were playing "Puss in the Corner," and went chasing across the room in the excitement of the game. Nobody outside that room knew all that went on there. The only evidences of the conflict were the entire exchange of pillows that had been effected during the night, the strange disappearance every morning of boots and shoes that were carefully placed by each bedside the night before, and some bruises on the wall-paper that looked as though they had been made by the heels of boots or shoes. But the boys couldn't have walked on the walls. Aunty never made much inquiry about these bruises: she was only too thankful that they were not on the boys. She had a comfortable way of not seeming to see things that had better not be; and it took a real house-shaking to bring her up from her well-earned slumbers. Sometimes, however, she came to the door, and warned her young lions to lie still; and then it was amazing to hear the chorus of innocent snores with which the boys answered her.

"Mercy on us! them boys must be all sleeping on their backs, by the snoring they make," says

Aunty. "Guess I'll have to send Prince up to turn 'em over;" and she goes chuckling down the stairs.

Every boy knew what Prince's turning-over meant. Big-hearted as he was, his rough hand knew how to make boys tingle when they went too far. He had turned over more than one of them, when they plagued him, or got in his way. The threat of Prince was generally enough to restore order.

But I am keeping my readers in-doors too long on this bright August day, which I have invited them to spend with our young friends at Berrytown. Aunty Patch will fix every thing all right within doors: never you fear. And Prince, with his hired man, is putting the garden in shape. It will never do to neglect that, with twelve boys to keep supplied with beans and squashes and corn and potatoes. Fred and Jimmy stop a few minutes by the wall, to see Prince handle the weeds that have taken advantage of the haying-season, to get ahead of the farmer.

"O Prince! don't you want us to do your weeding for you this summer?" says Fred, with an eye to getting taken to *mash* when the time comes for salt-haying.

"Sartin," says Prince: "take right hold." But the boys were like many older people: they only meant to work "some other day, not now."

So they ran off to the barn, to see the new colt. First they went to the stall where Black Bess used to stand; but she was not there. Brown Beppo was in his place, next stall, and gave them a bright "How d'ye do?" out of the corner of his eye. But the boys knew that Beppo liked them best at a distance; and after greeting him with very brave talk, such as "Ah! Beppo, old boy, is that you?"—"Good horse!" (how they would have run, if Beppo had lifted his heels as he knew how to do!) they went in search of Bessie and the colt. Perhaps she was in the pasture.

"Seen any thing of her, Fred?" said Jimmy, as they passed to the rear of the barn.

"No: where can she be?"

"Can't be far away, Fred: Prince has barely had time to unharness since we got here."

"Perhaps she's in the kitchen, Jimmy," said Fred, laughing to remember how Aunty Patch used to pet Bess, and treat her to potatoes and apples, or some other goody, whenever she came home from a drive. I believe Bess had been known to walk almost into the kitchen. It is certain, she had helped herself to apples from the kitchen-table; but she might have put her head in at the open window.

Just then, as if in answer to Fred's laugh, came a shrill whinny from the old "lean-to," as the folks called the the half-open shed adjoining the

great barn; which answered Fred's question as well, as if the colt had cried, "Here we are!" The boys were over the barn-yard fence in a double-vault; and, running to the door, they tried to open it. It was fastened inside. So it took them a minute or two to draw the latch. A round hole just over the latch showed them how to go to work to get in. "Look out!" Another minute, and young Bess would have been out. The boys were not expecting quite such active legs in the own daughter of old Bessie. They jumped back at the dash of the colt. But their fright frightened her. So she backed too; and Fred and Jimmy, recovering their presence of mind, entered, and quickly closed the door behind them. There stood old Bess, quietly munching hay; and, by her side, the colt, looking for all the world like a rat on stilts. Of course the boys did not make any such comparison as this. Do you think they would insult Bessie in that way?

No: as soon as they got over their surprise, they did exactly what their elders do when they go to see the new baby in a friend's house: they looked for something pretty, and exclaimed about that, hardly knowing themselves that they could not praise the creature as a whole. "Did you ever see such legs?" — "I say, Fred, they will make two-forty some day." — "Real streakers! ain't they, Jimmy? and see what a real sweeper

of a tail she has!"—"Yes, and how black she is! not a white hair on her, is there?"—"Yes, she has Bessie's star in the forehead, but that's all."—"Look out, Jimmy!" The colt here made a sudden start, apparently in all directions at once. It was very confusing to the boys: they couldn't tell which way to run. But it was only a false alarm. The young balloon, for so the colt looked, stood there, tied to the floor by his four legs, and swaying to and fro in a very uncertain manner. As it was quite impossible to tell which of his likenesses would carry the day, the rat or the balloon, the boys prudently decided to withdraw. They would be indignant if they could hear this description of Bessie's colt. When they came back to the farmhouse, they told Prince and Aunty Patch that they considered the colt "a beauty." O Flattery! how early you teach us youngsters to stretch the truth!

There was time before dinner for a look at the pigs. One look is enough for them. You think so, do you, boys? Then you never saw *little* pigs. Ten little pigs all the same age, and keeping their birthday,—just one month old! Look at them, all snuggling together in the corner of a covered sty, and tell me if you ever saw any thing so creamy,—creamy and pinky too, the beauties! They do say ugly babies make handsome men, and *vice versa:* I am sure it is so with pigs and horses.

There is nothing so ugly as a grown pig, except a young colt; and nothing so handsome as a grown horse, except a young pig. I know all the boys would agree with me if they could have seen those little pigs of Aunty Patch's. "What will you bet they don't take the prize at the agricultural this summer, Fred?" Fred wouldn't bet: Jimmy knew he wouldn't. Neither of them ever bet, but they talked like the veriest jockeys at a race. I have heard boys before who talked much worse than they really acted.

Fred and Jimmy had not finished admiring the little pigs, when a distant shouting announced that all the boys were coming home. You could hear them half a mile away. It was evident, from the direction of the alarm, that they had been to the river. "Let us hide somewhere," said Fred, "and take them by surprise." — "Oh! they know we're coming." — "I know it; but I mean, let's get up an ambush, and burst out upon 'em when they're not looking for us."

"All right! where shall it be?"

"Behind the stone-wall, just this side the bars; or back of the wood-pile in the pasture, if we can get there in time."

"Come on! I guess we can do it. I say, Fred, let's take a couple of tin pans, and come on them with a bang."

No sooner said than done. Two of Aunty's

bright milk-pans that were drying on the ledge were confiscated; and the two boys went racing across the field, their milk-pans shining in the sun, like the shields of Ajax and Achilles. They reached the bars in time; but the shouting of the fellows just over the brow of the hill warned them not to attempt the wood-pile.

Crouching behind the big stones on which the bars rested, Fred and Jimmy were glad to take breath for their coming onslaught. There was none too much time: the boys were over the hill. They came on, talking as they ran.

"Wonder if Grant and Pratt have come?" asked one.

"Don't tell them where we've been," said another.

"No: don't let 'em know what we've found. Now, Simp, if you go to blabbing, we'll tar and feather you; won't we, Matt?"

"Who's going to tell?" said Simpson.

"Better not!" said Matt.

"Hallo! there goes the bell!" cried half a dozen voices together. And, sure enough, there was Aunty Patch at the pantry-door, making the dinner-bell go like a dozen fire-alarms. "Hurry! hurry! hurry! hurry up! Hurry! hurry! hurry! hurry up!" a dozen times repeated while I am saying it once. There was a new rush by the boys to see which would pass the bars first; and

the whole crowd came leaping, scrambling, jumping, and tumbling over together.

Now's the time! And Fred and Jimmy jump from their ambush with two genuine Indian war-whoops, and a fearful accompaniment of tin pans. Of course no boy was at all frightened, — oh, no! nor yet surprised. At least six of them had seen the shining of the pans through the stone-wall before they reached the bars; and two declared they saw Grant's straw hat above the wall. Strange they forgot to mention it till afterwards.

"We know a joke worth two of that," said Matt.

"Yes: don't you wish you knew what we've found, Grant?" said Simp.

"By the way, Jimmy," said Matt, "did you bring down those things I asked you to get for me?"

"Don't you wish you knew?" said Jimmy.

"I hope you brought some fishing-tackle, Fred," said two or three of the boys. "We haven't brought half enough."

"And we've got such a splendid chance to fish now," said Simpson. "Now we've found a" —

"You thundering fool, stop!" cried Matt to poor Simp, who had almost told the secret he was trying to keep. "Yes, Grant, I hope you didn't forget your lines."

"Don't you wish you knew?" said Fred. "And

don't you wish you may get them? You'll have to wish, I tell you, if you don't let us into all the fun."

By this time the boys were at the old farmhouse door; and in two minutes they were fluttering about like sparrows in a puddle, with hands and faces in the row of wash-basins Aunty had placed for them on the settee. There was small attention given to the dinner-toilet at Berrytown. A good wash of hands and faces; a quick dressing of the hair, with pocket-combs; a tug, here and there, at wristbands and collars; and a final pull at the loose jacket, which straightened out its wrinkles just as long as the pull lasted, and no longer, —and we were all ready for dinner. Never mind the wrinkles: dinner will go far to fill them out. Dinner and appetite and Aunty Patch! Ah! when shall we three meet again, as in the old, old days! I can smell that pea-porridge now, with just a suspicion of pork in it, not enough to offend the strictest Jew, and salted to a smack. "More?" Of course you could have more if you wanted it: nothing ever gave out in that house but the eater's capacity. And, after the soup, you could have your choice of two kinds of meat. It was fortunate for the boys that there was no larger assortment. They generally decided in favor of "both," and they had their choice. As for the beans and peas, and summer-squash and potatoes, these

never counted: you could have all you wanted of them. You can imagine in what a state of preparation we were, after all this, for the puddings and pies. And yet I have known a round dozen of boys freshly undertake both, especially if berries were in them, at the end of a dinner that would have killed their parents. But there were no berries in the dessert that day.

"Bring 'em in, Maria Jane," said Aunty, after the beef and mutton had been discussed and unanimously passed. Maria Jane was Mrs. Wilson's oldest daughter. She came to Aunty Patch's, by the way, while the summer boarders were there. Her mother lived next door but one; that is, about half a mile away.

"Bring 'em in, Maria Jane," — these were Aunty's words; but you should have seen her face. Words are poor sauce to such a Thanksgiving look as she turned towards the pantry-door. Cornelia, calling in her children to present them as her jewels, might have looked as proud but not more happy than Aunty did on that day. The narrow brown-satin ribbon, on her scrap of a black-lace cap, fairly curled up with a sort of premonitory crispness, as if it knew what was coming. Her cheeks were red as peonies. She had just come in from the pantry herself, where she had gone for a minute, "just to give 'em a finishing shake," as she told Maria Jane.

Spicy breezes that blow soft o'er Ceylon's isle! where are you now? Such a richness comes stealing into the old kitchen, as Maria Jane goes into the pantry, that the very flies run mad with delight, and go buzzing about, and bumping each other, in the warm summer air, as if they had taken too much sugar and water. The boys were hardly less excited.

"What is it?" said Fred to Jimmy.

"What is it?" said Jimmy to Tom Smith.

"What is it?" said Tom to the next boy, who happened to be Romey Rich; and then came Aunty. No use to ask her. She wouldn't tell. But Dick and Harry Smith took up the ball on the other side; and so the question went round the board like a game of "Scandal," only every boy said the same thing.

But every boy did not give the same answer. One guessed it was "hot gingerbread." Pooh! dessert isn't luncheon! Another guessed "fried bread." Not much, with all that smell of spice about it. Well, then, "plum-pudding." No, it was nothing baked: Aunty wouldn't be giving a "finishing shake" to any thing baked. "Ice-cream," suggested the elegant Romey, and such a laugh as he got for his pains! "I guess hot doughnuts," said Jimmy, taking a fresh sniff of the delicious odor, and trying it as critically as a tea-taster would taste a box of tea.

"I know," said Simpson, waiting for everybody to guess wrong, that he might show his better wisdom. "I saw 'em on the rolling-board, when" —

"Stop, sir," cried Aunty, as fierce as a policeman, when he wants to frighten boys without the bother of taking them up.

"Oh, that's mean, Simp! You saw? what was it?" cried half a dozen voices.

But, before Simpson could answer, Maria Jane entered, attended not with Ceylon only, but with all the East Indies, — Sumatra, Borneo, Java, and the little Philippines; all in one big dish, and each island complete in an abridged edition. Now you know what they were, boys, — "pancakes," of course; plump, brown, hot, steaming, with crumpled edges, and, every now and then, long peninsulas running out like pan-handles. What would you give to get hold of one of them?

"Look out! they're piping hot." But the boys didn't care. Perhaps it was because they, the boys, were so much hotter, with their eagerness and their previous exertions, that the pancakes were cool in comparison. All I know is, they went like hot cakes, as they were; and there's an end of it.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT'S UP?

BUT that was not the end of it, either. The boys were sitting around the table, by no means satisfied, although they had swallowed the entire Indies in miniature, but sighing like all-conquering Alexander, because there were no more worlds to conquer.

"Aunty, may I be excused?" said two or three of the boys, folding their napkins, and laying knives and forks decently together on their plates; for Mrs. Patch would have as good manners at her country table as the boys were accustomed to at home.

"Wait a minute, boys," cried that irresistible woman. "Who wants berry-cake for breakfast to-morrow morning? Don't all speak at once."

That last warning came too late. A shout, as of the all-devouring Greeks, had already answered her, "I!" or "Aye!" Spell it either way. It means the same thing in this case. Of course they all wanted berry-cake. Were they not boys?

"Who will go and pick the berries? Don't all speak at once!" laughed Aunty.

"I," and "I," shouted Fred and Jimmy. But not another voice responded.

"Well, you see, Aunty," said Tom Smith, on whom her eye happened to rest, after looking all around the board, "we are all going on a very particular business this afternoon, in another direction; and so we can't go berrying."

"Yes, Aunty, we're sorry we can't go," said several of the boys; "too bad, but we can't. We'll go to-morrow or next day."

"All right! but to-morrow's berries won't make to-day's cake, you know. You'll have to go without the cake."

"Too bad. Can't be helped. I say, Fred and Jimmy can go berrying. They're not going with us."

"Oh, yes!" cried poor Simp, "they can go: they haven't seen the — Oh!"

Another moment, and the secret would have been a secret no longer. Simp was stopped at the fatal word by a thump on the table, just before his plate, which set the bread-plate spinning like a dying top, and scattered the crumbs all around. A modern Spiritist would have said that the spirit of Hercules had given that knock.

But Matt Ward, who sat opposite Simp, showed, in his angry countenance, where the blow came

from. He had aimed under the table at Simpson's shins, and, missing them, had struck the table exactly under the bread-plate.

Aunty saw every thing. There was no hiding from her little bright eyes. But she didn't show all she saw.

"Save the pieces, boys!" was all she said. It was enough. It was her way of saying, "Keep the peace;" and no reading of the Riot Act ever had more authority in it than she put into that one sentence. It was hard to tell whether to laugh or sulk, when this forcible peacemaker came down on the boys with her merry command. I have seen two of the fellows ready to tear each other's eyes out, over some passing quarrel, when all at once, like thunder out of a clear sky, a voice would sing out, "Save the pieces, boys!" and there was no more fighting after that. It was not so much shame or fear that stopped them, as a contagious good-will, which took hold of the heart whenever that cheery woman spoke. Cain never would have killed Abel if Aunty Patch had been there.

"Come, Maria Jane, lend a hand with the dishes."

The boys took the hint, and rushed out of doors. There they fell into an animated discussion, gathering around the old elm-tree, and considering what they would do. Some were for giving up

their plan, and going after berries. They all hated to disoblige one who was always working to give them pleasure. Besides, they all wanted berry-cake. Fred and Jimmy had already said they would go. Dick and Harry Smith said they would go with them. That made four; and the other boys agreed that Fred and Jimmy should be admitted into the secret the next day, if they would pick berries for the crowd that one afternoon. So they parted company well content; the larger number going towards the river, and the others, with pails and baskets, seeking the pastures.

It was not far, as the crow flies, from the house to the berry-pasture; but, as boys go, it was a full hour's walk. Crows are supposed to fly in a straight line, which is said to be the shortest distance between two points. Boys go by tacks, like ships against the wind, only twice as far out of the way. What can a boy do, being a boy, if it happens, that, just as he is crossing the road, Aunt Massy calls him into her little cottage, and treats him with seed-cakes that she "made a' purpose" for him? Or, having escaped this temptation, with only fifteen minutes gone, what can a boy do if, just as he is climbing over the wall that separates Massy Wheeler's garden from the five-acre lot, the old white turkey suddenly darts out of the bushes, and makes such a fuss that any-

body can see she has a nest not far off? Sure enough, there it is, close under the wall, — a royal couch, with a real turkey rug under it, and hangings of raspberry-bushes and tall grass. "Hurrah, boys! here it is," says Jimmy; "here's the turkey's nest, — lots of eggs in it!"

"Where is it? Oh, I see! Yes, as many as two dozen eggs, I guess. Ain't they beauties? Prince said old White Granny had stolen her nest somewhere." So the boys chattered. By the way, why do people talk about birds *stealing* their nests, because, like sensible creatures, they choose a secret place for them? Is it because men think every thing is theirs that isn't another man's, and so call a poor hen a thief, because she doesn't put her eggs where *they* can steal them?

"Shall we take the eggs home?" said Dick Smith. "Serve her right for stealing her nest, away off here."

"No! Prince won't like it. Better mark the place, and let her alone."

Another fifteen minutes gone. A run across the mowing brings them to the swamp; and nothing would satisfy the boys but a hunt for turtles in the bog-pond. Turtle-hunting is slow business, especially where there are no turtles. The boys found it very slow indeed. Nevertheless, they would have kept up the hunt till nightfall, if their empty pails had not reminded them, after

half an hour's fruitless search, that their errand was in another direction. Seizing their neglected vessels, they hastened to the berry-patch; and there they made such good use of their time, that they had their pails full in two hours of picking.

"Whose pail was full first?"

Ah! that is a disputed question. Fred and Dick Smith picked together, and Harry Smith and Jimmy went partners; and there was a race between them, which should fill their big pail first. Each boy had a dipper, or pint-pail, to himself; and, as fast as these were filled, they were emptied into the big pails.

"Here's to luck!" cried Fred, tossing the first berry he found over his head.

"Here's to common-sense!" said Jimmy dryly, dropping his first berry into his pail. And thus the race began. It would have puzzled Murray to lay out the track of that race. Zigzag, criss-cross; now this way, now that, the boys went from one clump to another, too busy to talk, and too eager to look around them on the beauty of the spot.

It was no more beautiful than hundreds of other berry-pastures scattered over New England; but that is beautiful enough. A whole choir of pine-trees was singing on Birnam's Hill, in the west. But the brook's voice was clearer, trilling out of the alder-thicket on the other side the pasture.

The wind, blowing over Sewall's mowing, brought delicious perfume on its wings. The birds had not begun their evening anthem; but now and then a single sparrow or yellow-bird would warble a few notes, or an irrepressible bobolink would go bounding through the still air, dropping his song as he flew. But the boys saw nothing, and heard nothing of all this, if seeing and hearing means putting your mind upon things. They could not have told you afterwards about the birds, or the brook, or the pine-trees, or the mowing; and yet all these went into the happiness, the joyous activity, and the remembered delight, of that afternoon.

"Come with me, Dick: I know a bully place," said Fred to his partner, as he turned his first pint into the big pail.

"Thank you: I don't like bulls," said Dick. "This place is good enough for me."

"Oh, pshaw! come along: they'll beat us if you don't. Let's see your pail. How many you got? You don't mean you've nearly filled your dipper a second time? Well, you pick green ones and all. I mean to do that."

So Fred ran on, losing time and berries every minute. He flitted about from bush to bush; never satisfied to pick one place clean, but always thinking he could do better farther on. If he had not had a partner who knew how to stick, he

would have been beaten off the field; for Jimmy was a steady hand, and Harry Smith, his partner, was a better picker than Fred.

There's no better place than a berry-field to show what is in a boy. Is he lazy? he will lie down. Is he greedy? he will eat more than he picks. Cunning? he will fill the bottom of his pail with leaves. Stingy? he will keep you away from his good place. Changeable? he will be always roving. Mean and thieving? he will fill his pail from yours, if he can, and call it a good joke. Easily discouraged? he will go home with his pail half full. But let a boy be smart, good-natured, fair, generous, thorough-going, and plucky, and he will have an ample field for his talents in a berry-pasture. I should like to go berrying with such a boy as that.

But then, we must not expect all these virtues in any one boy, to begin with. So I will go with any boy who means to try to be fair and generous and jolly, and all the other good things. A berry-field will be a good practising-ground for such virtues. If there is any boy who says he wouldn't go berrying any way, that it is small business, and not worth the trouble when you can buy berries in the market for ten cents a quart, then I say to that boy, "You will never make an honest fortune of your own. See if you do!" The boy that will not pick berries shall not pick guineas. Many

a rich man in Boston and New York earned his first money picking berries. And, better than that, he learned, at the same time, how to add little to little, till he made a mickle. If any young boy wants to find a good commercial college, I recommend him to enter the nearest huckleberry-swamp, and work there until his back aches, and keep working until his pail is full, whether his back aches, or not.

But whose pail really got full first? That, I say, is the disputed question. Fred says his, and Jimmy says his. Fred says he tipped his pail over when it was half full, and that accounted for a little disparity in the fulness of the pails. Fred always tells the truth, but I suspect he magnified the extent of the damage a little. They say people who are good at excuses are never good at any thing else. It is not so: Fred is a good fellow, and he shall not be abused. He will make a smart man some day. But I rather think Jimmy's Co. beat in that particular business.

Neither pail was filled any too soon. Late risers go late to bed. Boys who loiter at the start have to work beyond hours. It was nearly supper-time when they started to go home. Buttercup was up at the bars lowing for her calf, and the boys could hear the farm cows answering her from the lane behind the barn. The supper-bell rang before they were half across the field;

but that was nothing unusual. Aunty Patch always allowed five minutes grace. Any boy who got to the table five minutes after the bell rung was in season for the best of the feast.

All the boys met at nearly the same moment in the big kitchen, which served as a dining-room; the river-party passing in through the pantry, and the berry-party coming in at the front-door.

"Let's see, Grant: how many did you get? Whew! you didn't pick all those! Isn't there any thing but berries in that pail? I bet it's half full of leaves. Come, now, tip 'em up. I say, give a fellow a taste."

"Come, come, boys, supper's ready: let those berries be. Fred, you did well! picked 'em all yourself, of course. Jimmy, Harry, Dick, why didn't you help Fred pick, you lazybones? Here, Maria Jane, put these pails where the hens won't get 'em, — 'two-legged hens,' I mean." And Aunty laughed at the newspaper-joke, as if she hadn't read it in the last "Berrytown Do-Tell," and chuckled till she had cried over it.

No, I will not let you know what they had for supper. I shall be making you greedy before I know it, if I enter into a full description of all the meals at this luscious old country-house of my boyhood.

It was not flapjacks: that is all I will tell.

The river-party had nothing to say of their

afternoon work. Fred and his companions had all the talk at table, and they were equal to it. The discovery of the white turkey's nest created a genuine sensation. Fred would not have changed places with Christopher Columbus at that moment; so proud was he of the discovery, which, be it remembered, he had not made. But he got the credit of it, because he had the quickest tongue,—a common occurrence in life. Men are often praised for others' virtues, but as often blamed for others' faults. So, perhaps, fame is more fair than true.

After supper, was loafing-time; and the boys generally talked with Prince as he sat on the front-doorstep, after the day's work was done, or made a call on Aunt Massy over the way, or bothered Aunty, as she sat in the kitchen doing the mending for her wearing family of a dozen tearing boys. This evening they strolled over to Massy's cottage. But who was she?

Massy and Trudy Wheeler were two maiden sisters. Who their father and mother were, I never knew. I don't think it ever occurred to us boys that such old people ever had any parents. Nobody could remember when these two sisters looked any younger than they looked when we knew them. It certainly would not be possible for any added years to make them look any older. Massy and Trudy were pet names. Their real names, as

shown in the family Bible, were Mercy and Truth. Mercy and Truth had long met together in their poor old cottage; which, like themselves, had outlived the modest fortune necessary to keep it in repair. What supported them, only a good God and kind neighbors could tell. They had nothing, — "nothin'," as they sometimes said, "but faith in God." Certainly the ravens did not feed them. The only birds of that variety, commonly called crows, stole all they could from them. They pulled up the sprouting corn, which Prince planted every spring in Massy's garden for her, and both sisters tried in vain to frighten them off; although they certainly looked as much like two scarecrows as any two creatures could, when they stood at the back-door, and swung their gaunt arms in the air, and stamped their feeble feet, and cried out in a high but weakly treble, "Go away, go away, go away!"

Mercy was the strong one. Truth was always "ailin':" as she herself said, "she didn't enjoy good health." She sat in a rocking-chair, nearly all the time, looking at "sister," as she moved about the room; and when Mercy went into the only other room in the house, the pantry, — they slept in the attic, — Truth would fix her gaze upon a mournful picture of a lady with three lovely children standing by a tombstone, over-arched by a weeping willow; or, if cheerfully inclined, look

out the window at the flaming marigolds and tall sunflowers, with here and there a prince's-feather, — the flowers in which Mercy took such pride and delight. Sometimes her active sister would come smiling from the garden, and lay a sprig of lad's-love in Trudy's lap. Poor old girls! Call them silly, if you will. There's many a young girl less happy in her youth, and her young lad's love, than Truth and Mercy were with their perishing grasses. Our boys never called them silly, never laughed at them, never thought of such a thing: no more would you, if you had known them.

"Here come our boys," said Trudy, from her chair by the window; her face brightening like a gray cloud in the west, when the sunset-light touches it, as it was doing at that same moment.

"Sure enough!" said Massy, coming to the window to see, "sartin sure! and ez likely boys as there is growin', Trudy."

They always called us their boys, and always told what an "amazin' sight of comfort" they took in us. They really seemed to think that we belonged to them. One would have supposed that we spent the greater part of the year with strangers in the city, like English boys at boarding-school, and came home to them for the holidays.

"Just see, sister, how our Freddy has grown since last summer; most ez tall as my oleander,

I declare for it," said Massy to Trudy, as Fred came into the room that evening.

Trudy smiled, and nodded her head, and put her rheumatic hand to her cap-strings to make sure they were tied, and touched the top of her head, as if that would do any good. She wanted to look her best when the boys came home.

"And here's Jimmy, growed a man, I'm sure. It *doos* seem good to see you; now, don't it, sister?"

"Yes, indeed! I never thought, last summer, boys, that I should be here to see you, when you came back again." And Trudy's worn hand went fumbling around her pockets, as one feels for something in the dark. Fred picked up the molasses-colored big silk-handkerchief, which had fallen on the floor, and gave it to her; and she wiped her eyes, and sighed.

"Now, sister, now, this'll never do. — She'll feel better in a minute, boys. Take a seat. We're proper glad to see you."

It might have embarrassed any strange visitors at the cottage, to be asked to take a seat, when there was only one spare chair in the room. But the boys had been there before. They soon found perches for themselves, — one on the woodbox, one on the old hair-trunk, two on crickets, and the others sat on the door-step, or lounged around the windows, hanging on the sills, and looking in now and then, just to feel that they belonged to the party.

"I brought you some berries, we picked this afternoon," said Jimmy. "Aunty thought you'd like them."

"Well, now, if that ain't kind! and you picked 'em all yourselves. — Jest see, sister, d'ye ever see nicer berries than them? — Give our love to Miss Patch, boys, and thank her kindly, and you, too, for pickin' 'em."

"I say, Aunt Massy," said Matt Ward, looking in at the open window, — Ward was the biggest and roughest boy among us — "have you got any old rags you don't want? We want to get some for a certain purpose."

"Old rags!" answered poor old Massy. "I haven't got much of any thing else, Matthew;" and she looked at her patched gown, as if she feared to find a rent somewhere in it.

Matthew colored. He had not meant to be rude. The other boys looked troubled, lest Aunt Massy should feel hurt; and two or three voices said quickly, —

"Oh! we only want some very old rags; bits of cloth that nobody can use, that is, nobody can wear, — don't you know?"

"Yes," piped Simpson from the doorway: "we want 'em, you see, to stuff into the cracks of a — Ow!"

Poor Simp! He never could keep a secret. Nothing saved it this time but a pinch on the leg,

from one of the boys on the doorstep, administered just in time.

Aunt Massy said she would see; but she was afraid she hadn't any thing. She used all her old rags to braid up into mats. She drew her basket of braid out, and was going to give the boys the strips she had cut up ready to braid. She would have given them the gown off her back if she had owned any other except her Sunday-go-to-meeting best black bombazine. But the boys wouldn't hear of her giving away her mat-rags, although they were exactly what they wanted.

"Bless you, I don't need 'em, boys. Take 'em and welcome, if you want to: we've got mats enough to last our time. Now I sha'n't like it a grain if you don't take 'em."

The truth was, the dear old woman was only too thankful that she had something the boys really wanted.

She took as much pride in making up that bundle of rags for "her boys" as ever their rich aunts and uncles had done in sending them Christmas presents. And, if love has any thing to do with giving value to a gift, who can tell the worth of that parcel? The Queen of Sheba's presents to King Solomon were nowhere beside it. It was better than gold to the boys, because they wanted rags, and just then they did not want gold.

"Thank you! thank you! you're a real trump, Aunt Massy."

"Not a bit of it, boys: I'm sure you're heartily welcome. Come agin when you want more. I'm seldom out of rags: they're poor folks' riches, rags are; come agin," and the old lady laughed, as if poverty were a laughing-matter. And well she might, for she was rich toward God. She was a good woman.

"Prince," said Aunty Patch, as her strong-handed son came into the kitchen that evening, after the barn-chores were done, "I wish you would take a turn down by the river, and see what's up. The boys have caught something down there, an alligator, perhaps. I wish you'd look and see."

Prince laughed. "Alligator" was a good joke. "Ain't you afraid to have me tramping round in such dangerous places after sundown, mother?" says he.

"Now you go along, Prince: I'm in earnest. The boys have been down to the river all day: they couldn't go berrying this afternoon because of special business somewhere else. Ward kicked Simpson for almost telling their secret. They were all as mum as beetles at supper, and I must know what's up. If you don't go, I will."

"All right, I'll go fast enough: don't you get worried. Where are the young pirates now?"

"The young gentlemen are at Aunt Massy's, Prince."

"Oh, yes! the young gentlemen are at Aunt Massy's, seeking what they can devour, I suppose. Hey, mother?"

"Prince, there's no time to lose. Go now, if you're going, and mind you find out what's up."

"Shall I bring the alligator home with me, mother?"

"No need, Prince: we don't want any more jaw in this family, with you round. Go along."

Prince went.

CHAPTER X.

A SURPRISE.

INDIAN RIVER was as crooked a piece of nature as the animal after which it was named, — a skulking, crouching, slippery, crawling stream, making its way through the bushes, and under the trees, like a real wild Indian. Prince, coming boldly down through the clearing, whistling as he walked, would have made a magnificent back-woodsman if his lot had happened to be cast in these parts a century or two earlier. As it was, he did make a magnificent young farmer, the plague and pride of his widowed mother's heart.

"Let's see if there are any tracks of the 'gator on the beach," said Prince to himself, going first to a sandy shelving bank where the boys used to take a daily bath.

"Here's a track of one," laughed Prince; "but not exactly that kind of a 'gator, — boy's shoe, that."

He then pushed along the bank down stream, keeping near the brink, but saw nothing unusual

for some time; when, just as he was turning to try the other direction, he saw something long and large and black, hiding under the alders, about twenty feet distant from him. "Guess that's him;" and Prince pushed boldly up to it, and found the secret.

"So this is what's up, is it?" said Prince to himself. "Well, it might be worse."

It was an old boat past use to its owner, which had floated down stream. The boys had captured it, and towed it into port, and evidently meant to retain possession of it. They had begun to fill its cracks with rags; and the stones they had used for hammers, and the pointed sticks which served for chisels, were placed together under the boat, which was turned upside down.

"So, so," said Prince, pulling at an end of one of the rags which was hanging out; "so there's where the stockings go!"

It was one of the boys' stockings, sure enough! One or two handkerchiefs of doubtful complexion also appeared in the stuffing; and Prince began to calculate how much of the boys' clothing would be left, at this rate, by the time the old boat was thoroughly calked.

"Now, this won't do. Marmy won't like this noways," says Prince; "only to think of her sitting up nights mending stockings for these young scamps to stuff into old boats! Can't stand that noways!"

While he was musing thus about the boat, the boys, little thinking their secret was discovered, were smuggling their bundle of odds and ends from Aunt Massy's to the hay-loft in the barn, intending on the morrow to begin their boat-mending with new ardor, and better prospect of success. They found Aunty Patch in the kitchen, with a great pile of clothes before her, busily mending and putting them in order.

"Matthew," said Aunty, "I believe you must have a nail inside the sole of your boot, to wear out your stockings so; just take off your boot, and let me see."

Matthew blushed, and tried to excuse himself, saying he should feel it if there were a nail there. And so he would, especially at that moment, when he had no stocking between his foot and the boot. But nothing would satisfy Aunty but a thorough investigation on the spot.

"Come, take off your boot, and let me feel. Ten to one there's a nail in that heel. I know there's five in the toe, and yet you don't feel them."

Matthew unwillingly drew off his boot, exposing his stockingless foot as he did so.

"Why, how's this? you haven't got any stocking on! Where's your stocking, Matthew? You'll be having chilblains in August, boy, if you don't mind. Don't you know that August chilblains can't be cured?"

Matt told the literal truth when he said he left his stockings down by the river; but, if he had told in what condition he left them, he would not have escaped so easily.

"Be sure you bring them home to-morrow, Matthew."

"Simpson," says Aunty, looking quickly at him, "didn't you know that pocket-handkerchiefs were made before fingers? Where's your handkerchief, boy?"

Simpson dropped his hand from his face, as if to find the needed article, and turned doubly red when he found he had none, — as it suddenly occurred to him where he had left it.

"Come, boys, high time you were in bed: don't you hear Prince fastening the pantry-door? Maria Jane, bring in the candles! Fred and Jimmy, you know your bed, the one with the album-quilt on it. Now, boys, mind you keep quiet, and let these young travellers sleep. They've come all the way from Jeruh to-day, besides picking berries all the afternoon. Prince will certainly come up if I hear any noise. Good night!"

"Well, Prince," — when the boys were out of the way, — "well, Prince, what's up? Did you find any thing?"

"Yes, I found out a new way of mending holes: better try it, mother."

"How's that?"

"Why, putting in more holes!"

"What nonsense are you talking, Prince? Did you, or didn't you, find what those boys are up to?"

"I say, yes. I found they were up to stopping up holes by putting in more holes. They've found a leaky old boat, and they've been stuffing ragged stockings and handkerchiefs into the chinks to make it tight."

"Mercy on us! You don't mean to say so. Well, that beats all! those nice stockings that I darned my eyes out into! So that's where Matthew's stockings are, and Simpson's handkerchief. I thought he looked uncommon sheepish. I hope you burned the old boat up, Prince. I shall never have an easy moment if they are going fishing day after day in a seve. Did you?"

"Don't be worried, mother: they won't be likely to go fishing more than once in a sieve, or in that boat either, in its present condition. All the stockings and handkerchiefs in that basket wouldn't make her seaworthy; although I have no doubt the boys would put all their clothes into her, before they would give up the trial."

"And you advise waiting, I suppose, till they make themselves as naked as young savages."

"No: I think we'd better give them some good

stuff for calking, and let them see what they can do. The boat is worthless as it is. It belonged to Maria Jane's father. I stopped and saw him on my way home. He says the boys may do what they please with her: he doesn't care. Suppose we let the youngsters work, only helping them make the thing ship-shape; and then, when they want to float her, I will go with them, and make sure that all is safe."

"Only to think of it," says Aunty, her mind returning to the subject as if drawn to it by some terrible fascination, "those stockings, that I've slaved over like a Guinea slave, stuffed into old boats! I declare, Prince, I've a mind to put a nail in Matthew Ward's boots, just to pay him for his impudence."

"So I would, mother! Will you have a board or a shingle nail, or a tack? I can get you one in a minute."

"I'll have none of your impudence, Prince: twelve of 'em's quite enough, without your making a baker's dozen. I never felt more like sending you up to turn those boys over in my life. They do deserve it."

Prince laughed a great laugh, which went roaring up the big chimney like a sheet of blazing paper.

"Hush, Prince! you'll be waking those dear children," says Aunty, catching the jollity of her

big-hearted son in spite of herself, and falling into her most captivating look of half-laugh, half-frown, but entire good nature.

Prince was so tickled at the idea of waking the dear children ten minutes after they had retired, when they were never known to go to sleep for an hour at least, and when the faint beginnings of the usual evening riot were just making themselves heard, that he sent another laugh crackling and echoing up the chimney.

"Now, Prince, I command you to go to bed. I won't have you making such an uproar in my house at this time of night. What will the neighbors think?"

"I'll harness up to-morrow morning, and ride down to Wilson's, and ask him. He's about as near a neighbor as anybody, without it's Massy and Truth; and they're deaf as door-posts."

"Well, have some consideration for your old mother, then; don't you see how nervous she is? Really, now, what do you propose to do about this business of the boat? Will you speak to the boys, or shall I? Or shall we both keep still, — eyes open, mouth shut?"

"Oh! keep still, by all means. You let me manage it."

"Very well; only you must put a stop at once to this destruction of the boys' clothing. I can't have that. Their mothers will think I've been

taking their little socks to clothe my own son, Prince. It'll never do!"

Prince's feet were enormous: they were bigger for feet than his hands were for hands, if that were possible. But he didn't care: they knew how to take him over the ground. The very next morning, before the boys were out of their beds, and while Maria Jane was kindling the fire, Prince came in, with his big boots drenched with the morning dew. He had taken quite a walk already.

"Where have you been, Prince, to get your boots so wet?" said Aunty.

"Oh! tramping round."

"Well, don't go tramping round my nice floor, *if you please, sir!*"

Prince went out.

"Fetch the berries, Maria Jane."

It would do no good to tell you how those berry-cakes were made. You couldn't make them: for it is not the ingredients that make a cake: it's the woman. Any number of people had asked "Miss Patch" for her receipt for berry-cake, or pancakes, or batter-pudding; but, bless you! they never could get the same thing out of that receipt that she did. Nor was the difference all in the baking, as people always say when their oven-ventures turn out below their expectations. Aunty always said the secret of good cooking was in folks' elbows.

The breakfast was a perfect success; and the boys hurried away to the river as soon as they had made sure that there was no more berry-cake to eat. They did not forget to stop at the barn, and get their bundle of rags; and, with this new stock, they felt sure of making great progress that day. Fred and Jimmy had been let into the secret the night before; and the whole company went racing over the fields with one mind and one heart.

Prince laughed as he saw them running to their play, and half wished he could run with them. But there was the five-acre lot not yet mown: he must go and work.

"Ha, ha, ha! but I should like to see the young pirates a minute, when they begin work to-day," said Prince, laughing aloud, but speaking to himself. He had half a mind to run after them, and peep from behind the bushes. He never could have kept that laugh of his still, if he had gone. And really it was a laughable sight.

The boys came to their boat on the full run, Matt Ward leading, as his long legs were sure to do.

There she was, all correct; hadn't walked off, although amply provided with stockings. "Now, my hearties, heave-ho! carefully, now, — hold her on her side. Hallo! what's all this?" cried Matt. "Somebody's been here. What's this,

a paint-pot? Some painter put it here for safe-keeping. I guess we'll keep it safe; won't we, fellows? Just the thing we want, when we get these confounded cracks stopped up. What's in that bundle, Smith? The old fellow's clothes, I guess. No: as I live, it's oakum, — just the thing we want for calking! George! but that's lucky. And if here ain't some drills, and a hammer!"

"That isn't paint in that pot: it's tar," said Fred. "Smell of it, Matt."

"George! you're right. Better still! Hold on! what's that paper on the handle?"

The boys all crowded around, while Fred read these words, written in a girl's handwriting: "Stick — to — it — boys! Paddle — your — own — canoe."

Such a shout! and then such a hubbub!

"Let's see! Girl's handwriting? Nonsense! no girl did it. No! it's Prince or Aunty, or both of 'em. Just like one of their tricks! Ain't it jolly? No use trying to keep any thing from Aunty."

"Simpson!" said Matt Ward, looking cowhides at poor Simp, "did you tell?"

"No; I? Catch me telling! No, I don't know any thing about it."

"Well, they've found it out somehow. But it isn't a sure thing yet. There are some girls boarding over the river, at old Samuel Lovell's; perhaps

they did it. You keep still, fellows, and we'll pump Prince about it this evening."

This was voted unanimously, and they all went to work.

And a good forenoon's work they did too. Every thing went swimmingly, with the supplies so mysteriously provided; and the boys came home at dinner-time fully as fast as they had gone off in the morning, aching with curiosity to know whom to thank for the surprise.

They learned nothing at dinner. Aunty didn't tell them, if she knew; and they gained nothing by their guarded hints.

There was no hope of seeing Prince until evening. He never came to the table with the boys: couldn't spend the time. But in the evening, after the last chores were done, he was ready for a romp with the merriest.

This evening he came and sat on the front door-step; and all the boys gathered around him, eager for a talk. There seemed to be a more than common desire on both sides to see each other.

"Well, boys, what you been doing to-day?"

"Oh, not much of any thing! Loafing round." They hadn't been anywhere, "except down to the river."

"Why don't you turn fish, and live in the river? It seems to be all you care for. Matthew, I half expected you in the hay-field this afternoon.

What's got into you, boys? You don't earn your salt this summer. I thought you liked haying."

"So we do, Prince, but" —

"But; yes, but," said Prince, snatching Fred in his strong hands, and using him like a battering-ram on one of the other boys.

"O Prince! let go. Please let me go," Fred sang out. But Prince only hugged him the closer, and proceeded to scrape his short, bushy beard across Fred's cheek, till it tingled like fire.

Fred wriggled and screamed, half laughing, half crying; and the other boys came furiously to the rescue, — one seizing an arm, another a leg, and two or three clambering over Prince's back. He, like a good-natured lion attacked by mice, shook them off, and let them come on again, until they were all out of breath with laughing and screaming, and pulling and kicking.

"Prince, what on earth are you doing with those boys?" cried Aunty from within.

"Teaching 'em how to behave like young gentlemen, mother," said Prince.

"Well, don't teach 'em any more. Their manners will soon tear the house down."

"Mother," says Prince, "have you got any old stockings or pocket-handkerchiefs you don't want? I want to buy a lot."

"Better ask Matthew, Prince. He seems to have more stockings than he wants. He left a pair

down at the river yesterday. Matthew, I hope you found them all safe to-day."

"Yes 'm, I found 'em as I left 'em."

"Oh, you did!" said Prince; "and how did they fit? Rather a tight squeeze; wasn't it, Matthew?"

"Ratherish!" said Matt, looking very non-committal, but wide-awake for signs.

"I van, if you boys ain't been chewing tar," said Prince, catching Harry Smith and Jimmy, and sniffing at them as if they were roses. "You smell like Down-East schooners! Better not let marmy catch you doing it."

"What's that, Prince? what are the boys doing now?" from within.

"Better ask them, mother. Whatever it is, I should judge they'd stick to it, if there's any virtue in tar."

"Hurrah! it's Prince! it's Prince! I knew it was Prince," shouted half a dozen voices. "You're a real trump, Prince;" and the whole crowd leaped upon him as if they would eat him up.

"What, what! what's all this, you young Indians? can't you let a white man be, in the home of his fathers? Come! off with you, — shoot! paddle your own canoe, can't you?"

Such a roar as went up then, and such a rush! Nobody doubted, after that last speech, who the old painter was, that had left his paint-pot under

the boat. They all leaped upon him to a boy, and fairly swarmed over him. They couldn't abuse him enough for being so clever. They almost got him down on the entry-floor, when Aunty came to the door, to the rescue of her feeble offspring.

For a moment she could not tell which to rebuke, the boys, or the biggest boy of all, her own son.

"Mercy on us; save the pieces!" she exclaimed, as if by instinct; when she saw Prince suddenly rise from the midst of the swarming Lilliputs, and shake himself dry of them, like a great dog coming out of the water. The boys flew like drops in every direction; and the entry, the doorstep, and the greensward, seemed sprinkled all over with boys in every variety of prostration.

"Aunty," they all exclaimed, as soon as they could get their breath, "it was Prince."

"So I should think."

"No, we don't mean just now: we mean last night, this morning, some time, Prince did the bulliest thing."

"It must have been a minute ago, boys: you describe it very well."

"No, oh, no! down by the river, we mean. Down under the boat."

"The boat! What boat? What are you talking about, boys?"

"O Aunty! we thought you knew."

"How should I know? — knew what?"

"We thought you knew that we'd found a boat floating in the river, and were trying to make her tight."

"Oh, you did! you thought I knew, because you took such proper good care not to tell me, perhaps. Well, I did know it, — what then?"

"Why, we haven't had any good stuff for calking, you know," said Matt.

"No, I should think not, Matthew: stockings weren't made for that purpose."

"You put your foot in then, Matt," said Prince.

"I was going to say, that we didn't know what to do to fill up the cracks; and this morning, when we went to the boat, we found every thing we wanted, all ready for use; oakum and drills and hammers, and a pot of tar; and look here, Aunty, this paper was on the tar-pot. Can you tell who wrote it? Prince put it there; we've found him out: but that isn't his writing."

"Why, that's Ann Jeannette Bennet's writing. Prince, did you go over to Ann Jeannette's this morning? That accounts for your wet boots. Pretty time to be calling on a young lady, at five o'clock in the morning."

Aunty laughed a dozen laughs in one.

Prince turned as red as a turkey-cock, not with rage, but with bashfulness.

"That's Prince's girl," said Simpson.

Such a shout! Prince could not stand that: he suddenly remembered that he had left something at the barn.

O Prince, Prince! what you left behind you is farther away than the barn. You won't find it short of Farmer Bennet's house; 'tis the best-natured heart that ever beat in a man's bosom. Take good care of it, Jenny, and make our Prince a good wife. We'll never forgive you, if you don't.

CHAPTER XI.

AFLOAT AND ASHORE.

WELL, the old boat was mended in due time, "almost as good as new," the boys said. There is no doubt it was quite as good as new, for their purposes. It was like an old suit of clothes: they took real comfort in it because they knew they could not hurt it. I couldn't begin to tell the adventures of this old "Tarsides:" it went by that name; for, when it came to the question of naming her, the boys couldn't agree. "Watersprite," "Naiad Queen," "Belle," "Lotus," all sorts of fancy names, were proposed; but nothing fanciful seemed to suit the clumsy old craft. Then Fred suggested "The Three Brothers," for no reason in the world except that he had seen that name on one of the Down-East schooners on Thayer's Wharf. Then Jimmy proposed "Old Ironsides," and just then Prince came along; and, when the boys asked him what he thought of "Ironsides" for a name, he laughed, and said, "Better call her 'Old Tarsides,' I guess," and so they did.

It was painted on the bow, — "Tarsides." If anybody objects to the name, let him pronounce it Tar-sì-des, and half the people will think it stands for some naval hero who fought at Salamis. The boat was not speedy at the best, i.e., when it simply floated on the stream. And when we boys pulled and paddled, now on one side, and now on the other, and now on both sides, each boy having an independent stroke, it was really hard to say in which direction the boat went. The current always decided the question finally. I know we always made the best time when we stopped rowing. It was curious to see how much enjoyment the fishes took in that boat. They seemed to regard it as a sort of awning put up to shield them from the sun. I have watched them by the hour, lolling under the shadow of "Old Tarsides," now and then lazily nibbling the bait off our hooks, and all the while hardly moving a fin to keep up with us. It was so impossible to be afraid of that boat, after you had given a good look at it, that no living creature had any apprehension in regard to it, except from fire. It might take fire, but it couldn't sink. Aunty Patch, who came down to see it when it was launched, was easily laughed out of her imaginary terrors.

"Why, marmy," said Prince, "the boys will be safer in the boat than out of it."

"Well, boys, be sure you keep in it, then," said Aunty, and hurried home to her housekeeping.

While the novelty lasted, the boys did keep in it; and numberless were the voyages, up stream and down, that were accomplished by combined rowing and pushing and floating, until there was hardly a point on either bank, for a mile in length, that had not felt the touch of "Old Tarsides" butting against it. That Indian River was so crooked! In a week or two, however, the boat became an old story, and other pastimes had their turn.

Among these was a somewhat childish sport for such sturdy young sailors; but sailors are often childish when they get on land. And these inland mariners were not too high-minded, when on shore, to engage in playing at trades, around the old elm in front of the farmhouse. The roots of this tree stood up all around it, making deep gullies that ran into the trunk like natural caves. These, with a shingle for roof, furnished capital shops; and in these shops were kept a great variety of goods. The boys went partners in the different trades, because the number of good stands was limited. Matt Ward did business on his own account, employing Simpson and another boy to help him take care of his teams. The business was that of a livery-stable.

"A livery-stable! Horses kept in a cleft of an elm-tree? I think I see it!"

But not so fast. Who said any thing about horses? Ward's horses were turtles. No laugh-

ing! Was it not the tortoise that beat the antelope in the race? Our turtles were worthy to compete with horses. For our purposes they were better. Who wants a horse to pull a drag made of a bit of shingle? That was our cart; and on it the entire stock of our business circle could be transported in easy loads. Rich & Co. wanted nothing better for their loads of sand. They were in the sand-business. Pratt & Grant had all their trucking done by Ward. They dealt in lumber. The Brothers Smith did a heavy business in pebbles. And there was an eating-house and a bank, both making large drafts on the imaginations of their customers.

Ward's teams were the wonder of this business world. Snappers and mud-turtles were the only breeds he kept, — for the good reason that no other variety of turtle grew in that neighborhood. Harnesses of twine and leather were fitted to their shells; and, once yoked to the drags, there was nothing to do but to wait, and see when it would please them to go. Another serious question was, "Where would it please them to go?"

You could never tell beforehand. They would lie like stones when first harnessed, and it did no good to shake or spur them. Nothing but moral suasion would answer with these thick-shelled beasts. A blow or push would seal them up tighter than preserve-jars. It was worth a dozen

catechisms, to a rough fellow like Ward, to have these creatures to deal with. They taught him patience as nothing else would. If Bucephalus (that was the name of his biggest snapper) was unruly, and insisted on scampering away in the wrong direction, it did no good to strike him: then he wouldn't go at all. It was in vain to take him up, and set him down hard in the way he should go. Head and feet would suddenly disappear, and there was an end to all progress. At such times the Irishman's description of a turtle, as "a toad with a cover to him," seemed reversed, and the cover was more apparent than the toad. What a good thing it would be, if all the rough and cruel fellows who know no better than to lash and pull horses, when they themselves are at fault, could be set to driving turtles for a while!

Matthew was driving a tandem team one day. Bucephalus was leader, and one of the muds was behind. Now, if any thing is more trying to the patience than one turtle, it is two turtles. The chances of both agreeing to go in the same direction are only equalled by the chances of their both being willing to go at all at the same time. A load of sand of extra size was to be delivered within ten minutes at Rich & Co.'s sand-yard, about three feet distant. Two minutes' time was always given for starting, after all was ready. The two turtles sat immovable for two minutes

and thirty seconds. Really, there was more motion in the load of sand than in them; for some of it fell off by simple force of gravitation. Anybody who had never seen a turtle might have doubted which way the team was expected to draw. It seemed an even chance, whether the sand would carry the turtles, or the turtles the sand. Two minutes and thirty seconds by Matthew Ward's excited heart-beats, and at length the shiny nose of Bucephalus appears beyond his shell, then his freckled cheeks, then two snaky eyes, then the long, slender neck. Nobody could tell when the feet came, but there they were at last; and, with a heave-ho, the snapper gave a start. But not so old Muddy. There he sat, shut up in a brown study, as if there were no business in the world, but to hide one's head, and think. Matt longed to hit him. But what is the use? No turtle ever moved at a blow. Simpson was for poking him behind; but Matt was no fool, although he was quite cruel enough to do it, if it would do any good.

"Try him with a bread-crumb, Matt," said Fred.

"That's all you know about it, Grant," said Matt. "Turtles ain't chickens."

"I guess clover would fetch him," said Tom Smith, grinning at his own suggestion.

"No, no," said Jimmy, "they like flies. Here's one, Matt;" and with a quick snatch of his hand

he caught a fly that was buzzing around the eating-house.

Matt deigned to try the fly, holding it before old Muddy's mouth on the end of a stick; but Muddy liked live game, and wouldn't come out for any thing less.

"No go!" said Prince, stopping, on his way to the barn, to watch the fun. "Why don't you try a spruce-gum plaster, Matthew? Put it right on ahead, and it'll draw your whole team straight along. Warranted! Sartin shore!"

"Oh, you get out with your nonsense, Prince!" said Matthew.

"Yes," cried Jimmy, "why don't you put one of 'em on old Bess, next time you drive her?"

There was a general disapproval of Prince and his advice, and he was impolitely asked to leave; which he did, merely saying as he went, "I'll drop round after supper, and see that fellow start. Guess I'll be in time."

It was then ten o'clock in the forenoon. But Matthew concluded, after waiting ten minutes in vain, that Prince was about right, and gave up the job. At least, he gave up the attempt to fill his order with these turtles. There was but one animal of the turtle family that could draw that load; and he did not belong to Ward.

This superior animal was owned by the Brothers Smith, and went by the name of Brobdig. He

was a monstrous turtle. His full name was Brobdignag; but, as his owners agreed, Brobdig was enough. Anybody could see the "nag." Ward had tried again and again to get possession of the animal, but in vain. The Brothers Smith did a heavy business, as we have said, in pebbles; and they needed a large steed for their work. It was very mortifying to Ward, to be obliged to borrow a team to fill the order of Rich & Co. But he swallowed his pride, and sent around to Smith to hire Brobdig, to cart that load of sand. Brobdig made nothing of it. It was mere play to him; and he came up to Rich & Co's. with his load, without a single bead of sweat on his shining brow. Ward was more than ever anxious to get that turtle.

How should he go to work? He thought over the matter: and that evening he got a chance to speak to Tom Smith, all by himself, and he made a proposition to him.

"Come, Tom, you don't need that turtle so much as I do. Sell him to me: that's a good fellow."

"No, you don't, Ward: we don't sell Brobdig."

"Why not? I'll pay you well for him, and do all your teaming half-price. Come, that's fair."

"No, no: we had rather keep him, and get our teaming for nothing. Turtles don't cost much for keeping."

"Well, I'll do your teaming for nothing, Smith,

and give you fifty cents for him. Come, that's twice as much as you gave for him."

"Yes, but what will Dick say? He and I go partners."

"Oh, never mind what he says! You're the head man of that firm. He'll do as you say."

"Oh! of course, but" —

"But what? You're the oldest. I'd like to see any young brother of mine stop my trade," said Matt.

"I know, but then Dick is really half-owner. He helped pay for that turtle."

"Well, he only paid ninepence. I offer you fifty cents. You can pay him all he put in, and have two and threepence to yourself; don't you see?"

Tom Smith saw that plainly enough. But he also saw just as plainly that he would be a mean cheat if he did it.

"No," he said, "I won't do that; but I might sell Brobdig, and halve the profits."

"All right: I don't care what you do with the money; here it is!"

Tom still hesitated; but the man, no less than the woman, who hesitates is lost. He couldn't stand the temptation to double his money, and he took the bargain.

The next day Ward appeared on the turf with Brobdig among his stock; and the result was, that

the firm of Smith Brothers dissolved on the spot. Dick was so angry that he wouldn't take a cent of the money his brother offered him. Tom had no right to sell that turtle without his consent. He wouldn't have taken a dollar for him. He would as soon think of selling his head. Ward shouldn't have him, any way. Dick made a plunge at Brobdig, and would have carried him off by force if Ward had not interfered. There was a lively time on Change that morning; and there's no knowing where the quarrel would have ended, if Aunty Patch had not heard the tumult from afar, and hurried to the scene.

"Save the pieces, boys!"

There she was, standing at the front-door, with her sleeves rolled up, as if she were all ready herself for a fight; but on her face was such a look of good-will, that nobody could mistake whether she had come here in peace or in war.

"What's the matter, youngsters?" said Aunty.

The boys told their story; each making out the best case for himself, and each claiming the turtle as belonging to him. Matt had paid for it, and it was his. Dick had never agreed to sell it, and half of it was his; but which half? Aunty was completely posed for a minute. Then she remembered King Solomon's way out of a similar case, and quietly proposed to saw the turtle in two, and give half to Ward, half to Dick, and twenty-five

AUNTY PATCH.

"Save the pieces, boys."—Page 164.

cents to Tom. This even-handed justice suited nobody. All the boys were equally horrified at the proposition, so there was no telling in that way which was the real owner.

"What *shall* I do, Prince?" she called out to her hopeful son, who came to the rescue just in time. Prince heard the story, and then gravely advised that the turtle be made into a soup, of which the boys should eat an equal portion.

"Mercy on us! the critter has made stew enough already," cried Aunty. "If you can think of nothing better than that, you had better go along."

Prince went along.

"There, there, boys," said Aunty, "do as you would be done by. That's my rule, and better'n mine." And such a smile as she sent shining through that doorway would have melted hearts of stone. There was no more quarrelling. Ward kept the turtle, Tom Smith kept the money, and Dick went out of the business. That was as near as these boys came to the Golden Rule. How much nearer, I wonder, do their elders come?

But this was not the end of that business. Tom Smith was led to put his money into the bank for safe-keeping. Brooks & Co. did the banking. The boys intrusted their earnings in trade to this honorable firm, and expected in time to receive their own, with usury. Brooks & Co., of course,

invested the money, and ran risks in order to make gains. Their largest investment, as it turned out, was this: they advanced capital to Jack Hale and Harry Smith, who kept the eating-house. These enterprising caterers bought a large invoice of buns and jumbles of the travelling baker, expecting to double their money on them. But boys who could have all they wanted of the best thin gingerbread in the country were not to be caught by any baker's fixings. The result was, the entire stock dried up on the owners' hands, and had to be given to the pigs. This, with an equally unfortunate investment in damaged lemons, whose flavor utterly spoiled the ade they went into, broke down the eating-house. The bank followed in due time. Brooks & Co. kept what they themselves had put in, and satisfied their consciences by calling it pay for their services. All the other depositors lost every thing, and Tom Smith's money went with the rest.

It is not to be supposed that these big failures in the business world took place without creating a great deal of feeling. There were pretty hard words exchanged between the boy-merchants. Aunty Patch had to run to the window so often that she began to be tired of it.

"Dear me, Orissa," said Aunty, to her cousin Orissa Wilkins, who had driven over from Pumpkinsville to spend the afternoon, "do your boys ever play merchants?"

"Not ef I know it. Why, do yours?"

"Yes; and it's more than my life's worth to keep 'em from tearing each other's eyes out."

"Goodness gracious, Huldah! What do you mean? The young gentlemen don't fight, now, do they?"

"No, oh, no! but it keeps me with my sleeves rolled up all the time, to keep 'em peaceful."

"Lauk! how these city boys do carry on! My Lysander wouldn't hurt a hen; and, ez for Solon, he can't bear to kill a fly. I do believe he'd let a skeeter kill him 'fore he'd kill a skeeter."

"Humph! guess his wisdom's all in his name, then," said Aunty, by no means pleased at these reflections on her boys.

"But then," continued Orissa, as if not hearing Aunty, "our boys are not like boys in general. So steady and obedient-like! never get into any trouble. I tell 'em always to behave as if their mother was looking at 'em; and they do."

"How do you know that, if you are not always looking at 'em?" said Aunty.

"Oh! I would trust Lysander and Solon anywhere."

"Well, don't trust 'em playing merchants: take my advice."

"No need, I'm sure: they never wanted to play such an awful game. When Soly was very young, he used to play at graveyards, from living near

one; and, as for Lysander, I've known him stand behind the kitchen-table on a cricket, and play he was a minister by the hour together. But they never played merchants. I don't believe they know what merchants are."

"Blessed ignorance!" said Aunty: "if they are any thing like the boys that ape them. — Prince," Prince was just bringing an armful of wood for the big fireplace, "if you ever desert the farm, after I'm dead and gone, I'll never own you."

Prince started to say "Probably not," but he stopped himself. He couldn't joke about a thing so serious as his dear old mother's death; so he said quite soberly for him, —

"Why, what's up, mother? Who talks of deserting the farm?"

"Oh, nobody! but I've got such a horror of business-life, from seeing those boys at their trades, that I don't want any son of mine in them."

Prince laughed.

"Well, I won't go into the pebble-business, any way, nor take to keeping turtles, mother: so don't worry about that."

"See that you don't, Prince. I should be sorry to have to chastise you, as I am sure I shall have to do with some of those boys, before I get through."

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Matter! why, can't wash a rag, but those

boys are quarrelling before I can wring it out, and it's all along of their playing merchants. You saw that scrape about the turtle yourself; and now there's a tempest in the teapot because the bank has broke, and Hale & Smith have been spending all the boys' money for those pizun things old Spring the baker brings round. As if they couldn't get better for the asking, any time, in the pantry! I've lost all patience with their merchanting, and I just wish you'd put a stop to it."

"Goodness me!" said Orissa Wilkins, "I'm glad my boys never do such things. Lysander's the soul of honor, and so is Solon."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Prince; "'cause that may stop their driving pegs into my lasts. I just heard them proposing it to the boys in the shop; and I advised them, as a friend, not to do it."

"Oh! I'm sure you're mistaken, Prince: they never do any thing behind my back, they wouldn't do if I was looking at 'em."

"Guess you see some tall sport then, Orissa: that's all."

Mrs. Wilkins never could understand Cousin Prince. Aunty turned the conversation from the Wilkins boys to her own charge again, and repeated her injurious statement about merchants, and business and trade in general, all based on what she had seen of it around the old elm; and

ended by entreating Prince not to leave the farm for any city enterprise.

As Prince had not the least idea of leaving the farm, he took the lesson very kindly: only he felt bound to say, in defence of the business-world, that he supposed there were good men in it as well as bad, and more honest men than rogues, or it would never run so well as it did. He advised his mother not to lose all confidence in trade, because the boys made such poor work of it; and reminded her that at least half of the business-firms around the old elm had been managed without splitting up. He especially mentioned Fred Grant and Jimmy Pratt as having been the best of partners, never doing an unfair or unkind thing; and that showed, he said, that men could trade on the square.

"Well, I don't want it done on my square, that's all," said Aunty, interrupting him. "I do wish you would set those boys to work. There's twice the fun, and not half the mischief, in your hay-field, Prince. Turn 'em in, and set 'em to raking after" —

"And get all my rakes on the sick-list, I suppose."

"Yes, yes; better lose a dozen rakes than have me lose my temper."

"Well, I'll see about it, mother. Hate to have you lose your temper, though folks do say it's a good thing to lose."

"You never had any to lose, Prince; so you can't have that comfort. I've no doubt you're right about the traders and candlestick-makers. There's good and bad. But my opinion is, they'd all be better if they'd only roll up their sleeves, and go into a hay-field. Try it on the boys, Prince; try it at once, and you shall have berry-cake every morning for a week. Come!"

CHAPTER XII.

SOLON AND LYSANDER.

MEANTIME, where are those boys? Prince as much as told us, when he told Orissa Wilkins that her hopeful sons were advising the young gentlemen to drive pegs into his lasts. They were out in Prince's shop. "What shop?" and "Wasn't Prince a farmer?" and "Do farmers have shops?" Yes, farmers of our kind, — the steady, thrifty, wet-and-dry-weather farmers of New England. Very many of them have a shoemaker's shop near their houses; and when they cannot foot it abroad, on account of the weather, they foot it at home. They lose no time.

Prince's shop was a favorite retreat for the boys, especially in rainy weather. It was a snug little room just off the open shed. A door and two small windows were its only breathing-holes, except a small chimney. But the little stove appropriated that. This, with two shoemaker's benches and a single chair, made up the furniture; unless you call the tools furniture, and

lasts and a lapstone, and rolls of leather, and a bucket of water, and a blacking-pot, and an old broom, and such plunder. I call it plunder; for so it was to the "young pirates," as Prince had good cause to call them. They swarmed his small hive, and did as much to plague a busy man, and consume his time and stock, as ever a crowd of loafing drones did to bother the life of a busy bee. But he bore it all like the prince of good fellows, as he was; and only demanded that they should not use his best tools, or cut into his leather. "Really, marmy, a fellow's skin is not safe when your young gentlemen are around," he told Aunty.

"Take it out of their hide, Prince, if they take any of yours," was all the comfort he got.

But I have not told you the funniest thing about this shop. It had no paper on the walls, or next to none; that is, it had newspapers. Clippings from "The Berrytown Do-Tell," a weekly paper of long standing, covered one side of the shop. They had been cut from the papers as they came, and covered a period of seven years. They contained the witty things of that period. Prince said it saved lots of trouble to have 'em all cut out, and hung up and dried. The same stories came out every seven years in about the same order; and Prince could tell by running his eye down the column for December, 1842, what the jokes would be for December, 1849. "You can

always keep ahead of the paper," said Prince, "if you only go back far enough."

Besides the funny things, Prince had a saving interest in all the big stories; and on another panel of his shop he had stuck not exactly fish-stories, but farm-stories quite as improbable. The boys would stand, with eyes as wide as saucers, as they read this new edition of Munchausen: —

"Mr. John Eaton, of No-town, Nothere Co., Eng., has a cow that gave fifty-seven quarts of milk in one day. He believes she would have given more, if his pails had not given out."

"I say, Prince, do you believe that story?" some boy would ask.

"Not a doubt on't; but I guess she got the next kyow to help her."

"Miss Clarissa Jones, of Gooseport, Me., has a hen that laid twelve eggs in seven days."

"Oh, now, Prince!" says Fred, "that can't be true. I've kept hens, and I know."

"Oh, yes, that's true enough! Fed the hen on the multiplication-table, you know. Guess you never tried that."

"Farmer Grimes, of this town, raised a pumpkin this year, so large that he couldn't move it. He took it as he found it, and let it stand where it grew. It turned out very well. He made a hole in one side, big enough to take in a small pig; and the pumpkin kept the pig a whole month, and served equally well as pen and larder."

"Now, Prince, that's a lie, and you know it."

"No: must be true! I saw it in the paper myself."

One advantage of this wall of monstrous falsehoods was that Prince, who knew them by heart, could always tell a bigger story than anybody else; and, if his story was questioned, he could declare that he saw it in the paper; and that, with most people, was stronger evidence than if he had said he had seen it himself.

On that particular afternoon, when Aunty Patch and Orissa Wilkins were having their social chat in the house, with Prince for an occasional oar, the boys were all in the shoe-shop, as I have already said. But they were not engaged in reading stories from the wall. Their ears were filled from another and fresher source. Those pattern sons of Mrs. Wilkins, Solon and Lysander, who, in their mother's opinion, never did any thing in secret they would not as freely do in their own mother's sight, were entertaining their city cousins with as mischievous a chapter of experience and hearsay as could well be given.

Talk about country boys, and their greenness, and innocence of the vices that city boys are exposed to! Show me the boys, and I will think about it. I believe that youthful sins come as often from within as without, and the only safety for a boy, wherever he is, is in honest employment.

The more good things there are to fix a boy's interest, the better it will be for him. And the city, with its schools, concerts, museums, lectures, art-galleries, books, and society, is likely to give a boy a better chance to keep out of evil than most country places. There is too much opportunity for solitude in the country, and too narrow a range for the mind to play in.

I may be all wrong in my explanation of causes; but it does seem as if evil had a freer chance at a boy in the country than in the city. At least, country boys who are bad seem to be rather worse than their city mates. Perhaps country boys who are good are better, in their turn. Let the rule be as it will, these two country boys — Solon and Lysander Wilkins — were enough to give all the others a knowledge of evil, and a bold example of it, such as they had not seen before in all their lives.

It would not be best to rehearse all their talk, even if it could be remembered. I shall only tell enough to account for what takes place in this story.

"I say, Matt," said Lysander, addressing by instinct the roughest of the city boys, "did you ever lift a cat?"

"Slightly," said Matt, suspecting something under the meal.

"What do you mean, Wilkins?" said Simpson. "Anybody can lift a cat. I've done it."

"Haw, haw! You hain't, though. How'd she lift?"

Poor Simpson was confounded. He could see nothing difficult or strange in lifting a cat; and yet the savage laugh and scoffing question of Ly Wilkins made him feel as if there must be something dreadful about it. The other boys were as much puzzled as Simpson; but they were too proud to show it. Why is it that boys never like to show their ignorance of any kind of mischief? Not one of them had the least idea that "lifting a cat" meant any thing more than a perfectly innocent taking-up of poor tabby, and setting her down again, in a gentle, harmless way.

But Wilkins meant a very different thing. When he had raised the boys' curiosity enough, he proceeded to describe, giving all the rough and ugly particulars, the way in which he lifted cats. It was done by a deadly kind of trap, which caught the animal by the neck, flung her into the air, and broke her neck.

"How mean!" cried Fred.

All the boys really thought so too; but, instead of agreeing with Fred, they laughed at him. The laugh encouraged Wilkins to go on with his stories.

"I say, Soly, would you tell 'em about the watermelon? Haw, haw, haw!"

Young Solon agreeing, Lysander began a long account of one of his thieving exploits.

"You see, Myron Jones, he was allers braggin' of his squashes and taters and things; and, one day, Soly and me hearn him tellin' about a bully watermelon of his'n, that was growin' behind his barn. He said it was bigger round than a peck-measure already, and hadn't stopped growin' yit. I give Soly the wink, and off we went, leavin' Myron talkin' about his big melon. We ran round through the fields, so's nobody'd see us; and pretty soon we came to Jones's garding, in back the barn. We poked round 'mong the leaves; and, sure 'nuf, there she was, a real ripper, I tell you! Soly cut the skin quick as lightnin'; but, when we tried to lift her, we couldn't. Soly took hold one end, and I t'other, but 'twasn't no use. She leaked right through our fingers. 'S'pose we cut her up, and take away the pieces,' says Soly; but that wouldn't do. We mightn't get the whole; and, 'sides, we didn't want to hurt the melon, you see. What d'ye think we did, fellers? We just took and rolled her. When we got to the wall, we were beat. No liftin' her over any way. So we just took down a bit of the wall, and shoved her through. There were some bushes, and a thick wood, in the next field; and we rolled the melon down there, and hid her. Of course we put the wall up agin, so they shouldn't know which way the watermelon run out. We cut as many slices as we wanted, and went round

to Smith's barn to eat 'em in the hay-loft; and, while we were there, Myron Jones, he came in, and began braggin' about his big melon. We were up in the hay-mow, and we could hear every word he said.

"Gorry! wa'n't it fun, Soly! Myron, he told Smith how that melon o' his'n was the beater for runnin'. He did'nt know but it would run over the wall, next thing. Haw, haw! I'm 'feard Soly would 'a' larfed right eout, when Myron said that, ef his mouth hadn't been full of water-melon. Smith, he only laughed at Jones and his braggin', and said he guessed that melon had the dropsy, and told Myron he'd better tap it. But we saved Jones that job. We tapped it. Haw, haw!"

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!"

How all the boys laughed! And when Ly told them how mad Jones was when he found his melon gone, and how he went around among the neighbors, swearing vengeance on the thieves if he ever found them out, the little shop couldn't contain the noise. The sound of the merriment came to Aunty's ears, as she was sitting in the kitchen talking with Cousin Orissa.

"What's up now?" she said to herself; but she did not go to see at that very moment, because she did not like to interrupt "Miss" Wilkins in her praises of her model boys.

Meantime, Lysander put the finishing touch on

his story, by describing how he finally told Myron about the theft. He took a time when Myron couldn't touch him. They were both in church. The minister had been reading from the Bible, and announced the hymn. Myron was sitting in the pew in front. Lysander leaned over, and said in a whisper, —

"I stole that melon."

"Myron looked round, madder than fury, and said he, 'I'll give it to you after meetin';' but I got out of meetin' first," said Lysander. "He never did any thing. We told him where he'd find some of the seeds, ef he wanted 'em, down in them woods. Haw, haw, haw!"

Ha, ha, ha! haw, haw, haw! ha, ha! haw, haw! ha, ha! and such a tremendous roaring and laughing came from the shop, that this time Aunty rose, and said she hoped Miss Wilkins's model boys weren't making models out of her flock. She'd be bound they were up to some mischief.

"Well, if there's any mischief, it's home-bred," says Orissa, with more spice than she commonly put into her speech.

"No doubt of that, Orissa," says Aunty; but she evidently meant Orissa's home, not her own.

"What can have got Prince? I wish he would go and look after those boys. I know they are in mischief. Like as not they're carving the lapstone with his shocknife! Prince, Prince!"

"Marm!"

The voice came through the open window, just a moment before Prince came through the doorway.

"Will you see what those boys are doing in your shop? They make noise enough to take the roof off."

"Well, marmy, the shop needs new uppers. Dunno' as I'd object, if they did lift the roof."

"Very well, let the roof go, if you please; but I'm not going to have those boys committing murder with your shoe-knives; so go and put a stop to their experiments, or I will."

Prince went.

He found the merry company just subsiding from their laugh, at the story of mischief, into a readiness to do mischief themselves. It is always the way. More wickedness is caught by a contagious laugh than in any other way. Nothing seems very bad which is so very funny. And these boys, every one of whom would have been horrified at the thought of stealing, were all ready for just such a prank as Ly Wilkins had been describing, after they had laughed over it.

"I say, fellers, let's make some suckers," said Ward. "Did you ever make suckers, Wilkins?"

No; Wilkins didn't know that game.

"But there's no good leather," said Dick Smith.

All the boys went poking among the pieces on

the floor, but none appeared large enough for the purpose.

A sucker, such as they wished to make, is a round bit of sole-leather, shaved at the edges, and suspended by a string running through the centre. Soaked in water, and placed wet on any surface, and then pounded till a vacuum is made under it, this bit of leather will hold fast. The boys often made them, and lifted smooth stones or boxes, or pulled the door one way or the other, with them.

"There's plenty of leather in the corner: why not take that?" said Soly Wilkins.

"Oh, that's Prince's sole-leather! we can't have that."

"Why not? He'll never know. Don't take much, does it?"

"No; but we can't take any. Prince says we sha'n't do it; and, when he says 'no,' he means it."

"Well, I'll take it, then. He never told me not to. — Come, Ly! help a feller!"

Solon and Lysander stooped over to lift the heavy roll of leather. They were in this position, with their backs to the door, when Prince entered the shop. Quick as lightning, his big hand came down. One, two! It fairly made your ears tingle to hear them. Solon and Ly didn't need their ears to tell them how it tingled.

"Come, boys, clear out. There's at least two too many of you to-day!"

Orissa's boys picked themselves up, and went. They walked as if their shoes hurt them. The other boys followed, heartily ashamed of themselves for not defending Prince's property.

"Lysander, what on earth ails you? What makes you walk like that?" said Orissa as the boys filed past the kitchen-window.

"Prince hit me," said Ly.

"And me too," whined Soly.

"What do you mean? Prince hit you! Great rough fellow! Just like him. Miss Patch, can't you control your son? I really don't feel safe to come here."

"No! I don't feel safe to have you, Orissa. Prince is very hard on young sinners. Boys, what's the matter?"

"Nothin', we wasn't doing nothin'; only Prince, he came behind us, and hit us a clip."

"There, Miss Patch, you see!"

"Oh, yes, I see! Your fine boys were at work on Prince's hide, and he returned the compliment on theirs. Wasn't that it, boys?"

There was no denying the facts.

"Well, he needn't have been so rough, any way," said Orissa. "How should Soly know that he wasn't to touch that leather?"

"Because we told him," said Simpson. "We told him Prince didn't allow us to touch his sole-leather."

"Oh! then it seems your young gentlemen have done the same thing before, Miss Patch. I wonder if Prince treated them so."

"Rather think most of 'em know the weight of his hand, Miss Wilkins. 'Tain't a thing easy to forget."

"Well, I guess we'd better be getting home. I don't like to have my boys out after dark. I did think of staying to tea with you when I set out; but I shall feel easier to get the boys out of harm's way. You won't be sorry to have us go, I presume."

"Bless you! yes, I shall, if you're going off without your tea. Stop a bit, Orissa, and I'll set the tea right on. Prince'll harness up for you, while you're taking a bite. Ef you'll stop long enough, I'll, stir you up some flapjacks, that'll make your boys forget what hurt 'em, now, I'll warrant."

But Mrs. Wilkins was hurt in her feelings as a mother. She consented to take the tea, and ended by eating generously of the good things placed before her; but refused utterly to have the flapjacks. That would have been altogether too great a favor to Aunty Patch.

Of all the queer things in the world, the queerest is the way in which folks who have injured you turn round, and act as if you had injured them. Really, to see that woman and her rascally

young boys feast themselves upon Aunty's goodies, and take Prince's kindness in harnessing their horse (he was glad enough to do it for them) as a matter of course, you would have supposed that Aunty and Prince were the sinners, and Orissa and her sons were the parties sinned against.

"There, cousin, take some of these cookies for the boys' luncheon to-morrow."

"Oh! they won't want 'em, I reckon." Nevertheless, Mrs. Wilkins emptied the plate into her basket.

"Hallo! here's Prince with the wagon. Come again whenever you can make it convenient, Orissa."

"Well, I dunno' when I shall get over again. It's dreadful hard to get away. I didn't know heow to come to-day."

"Prince, can't you help the boys up?"

"Sartin;" and Prince lifted them to their seats as gently as he would lift a baby.

O Prince! if folks only knew how you longed to take those boys, neck and slack, and pitch them into that wagon, what a prodigy of self-control they would think you! It wasn't because they took liberties with Prince's sole-leather that he had this feeling: he had an instinctive sense that they were two mean, cowardly, sneaking little chaps, as they were.

"There! we sha'n't see Orissa and the boys again

this summer," said Aunty that night, as she was going to bed.

"Too bad," said Prince. And then they both laughed. But that visit was no laughing-matter, as we shall soon see.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NEW "CO."

THE sun rose as usual, the next morning. So did Prince, so did Aunty, and so did the boys. The three first named rose together; the boys two or three hours later. Aunty never encouraged early rising for them. "Nothing like sleep for growing boys," she used to say; and added to herself, "I know they're out of mischief when they're asleep." She herself was up with the sun, but she never took any credit to herself for her early rising: she did it from habit and necessity. "I'd like nothing better than to lie abed in the morning, if my work'd only do itself." She would often say, "Talk about the beauty of the sunrise, and all that: I find it the dampest end of the day, a good deal, and the dullest. The sun never looks so blue as when it is rising. It wakes up just like other folks, rubbin' its eyes like, and its face covered with frowzy mists and clouds. As for the dewy grass, the rhyming folks are always singing about, I just wish they had to wade through

it as Maria Jane does, every morning, when she comes to work. Guess it would take the starch out of their poetry if they once walked out of a morning. Fact is, the sun ain't r'aly up till it's two hours high. Lay abed, boys, and keep on growing."

Any time before eight o'clock was in season for breakfast; that is, for the loafers. But the workers on this farm got no breakfast after six o'clock, and no praise then if their appetites had not been sharpened by an hour's work beforehand.

"The top of the mornin' to ye, Mr. Patch," said Irish Tim, as he came to his work that day at five minutes past seven o'clock, A.M.

"The crame of the day to ye," answered Prince.

"'Crame' indeed," said Aunty, as she set her churn to dry on the window-sill. "There's nothing but skim-milk left at this time o' day. Maria Jane and I have churned a week's butter already. What makes you so late, Tim? I warrant you stopped to smoke your pipe before you left home."

"Och, mum, it's only a matter of five minutes late that I am. I'll p'ace it on to th'other end of the day, sure."

"Oh, yes! you'll take a bit of your head to mend your heel, Tim, I've no doubt. Don't you know, man, that a minute in the morning is worth a dozen at night? Come, be spry now: see if your hands can't catch up with your tongue, Tim, for once.

Prince, don't that hay want opening? Tim's eyes do. Lively there, steamboat!"

An hour or two later, when the boys had finished breakfast, Prince came into the big kitchen, and said, —

"Marmy, never heard of anybody's finding gold on the farm, I suppose?"

"Not unless they brought it with 'em, Prince. Why?"

"Oh, nothin'! only I thought I'd ask."

By this time the boys' curiosity was fully aroused. "What do you mean, Prince? Have you found any gold? I don't believe it. Where? Real gold, now? No joking? What was it in, — rock or sand? Let's see! Got it with you? Open your hand! Come, fellows, let's pry his fingers open!"

"Don't believe there's any thing in 'em."

With that, they all fell upon Prince, literally tooth and nail, and tried to tear his close-shut fist apart. A quartz rock would have been as yielding. Prince pushed his closed hand around among the boys, now setting a boy staggering backward with a straight blow, now chucking another under the chin, making him bite his own tongue instead of Prince's knuckles; now closing on a rash finger that had got under his, and making the owner thereof scream with sudden pain. And, when the boys had fairly tired themselves with

vain endeavors to open Prince's hand, he suddenly opened it of his own accord; and there, in the centre of his broad palm, was — what? "A gold dollar?" No. "A bit of iron pyrites?" No! "A speck of real gold in rock or sand?" No. "Why, what then?" Why, nothing, at all.

"I knew it: I knew you hadn't got any thing! I said so," so all the boys declared.

"I s'pose that's why you wanted to get my hand open; 'cause you knew there was nothing in it. But look again, and look sharp! You may find it yet. A grain of gold don't take much room."

They all looked, but could see nothing but the calloused palm of Prince's hand.

"What! don't see any gold there yet? What poor fortune-tellers you would make! Follow the lines on my hand, and what letter do they make?"

The boys on one side said "M," and those on the other side said "W."

"You're both right. 'M' stands for money, and 'W' stands for work. If you want money, work for it. That's Natur's handwriting. And now boys, do you see the gold? What's the difference between me, earning twenty dollars to the acre in my hayfield, and the Californy miner picking up a twenty-dollar nugget, after digging and slaving a month to find it? You won't find any gold-ore on this farm. The soil's too good for

that. But if you will go to work, and help me hay, I'll pay you all you're worth, and more too. Besides, the boy that works best shall go to *mash* with us, when we go for the salt-hay."

Mash was the country name for marsh. And, of all the privileges of vacation at Berrytown, the very chief was going to mash. The particular marsh to which Prince went was at Clam Cove, about six miles away. That is to say, the landing was six miles away, but the mowing was at least a mile farther; and this last mile was the charm of the business. It was over the water in a gundalow. No boy that never rode an elephant, knows the feeling of going in a gundalow. Not that the motion is the same; but the impression of doing a big thing is the same. The channel, through which the big boat took its course, was to and fro, between Bottle Island and the mainland. Prince steered with a long oar thrust out at the stern of the flat-boat, and two men pushed. Beginning far forward, they would walk the length of the boat, pushing with all their might; and in this hard, slow way, the voyage was made.

Matt Ward had been allowed to go on this expedition the year before, because he was strong enough to be of some service. But the other boys had only been to the landing, and so lost the "sea-voyage in a big ditch," as Prince called it. Matt had given an account of the fun, which made his

companions at first green with envy, and afterwards red with desire. All the boys wanted to go all the way to *mash;* and Prince could not have offered them a stronger inducement to enter his hay-field than he did when he promised that the best worker should go with him to get the salt-hay. It is doubtful whether the discovery of a real gold-mine on the farm would have tempted them more than this promise. They were eager to go to work at once; and, much to Aunty's satisfaction, they all went off to the field to devote themselves to the peaceful pursuits of agriculture. No more merchanting, at least while haying lasted; no more quarrels; no more greed, — nothing worse than healthy fatigue and devouring appetites. "Good things to sleep on," said Aunty; and, therefore, good for her boys.

Haying is hard work at best; but when there are a dozen boys in the field, all of them clamoring for something to do, and none of them knowing how to do any thing, haying is very warming to the temper. Anybody but Prince would have dismissed the crowd the first hour. But his good-nature never soured. "Stick your fork in as if you loved it, Jimmy," he said, as Jimmy and Fred attacked a cock of hay to spread it abroad. "There, Harry, roll up the caps: don't be napping. Matt and Dick, bring all the forks and rakes down from the barn. Tom, go get a pail

of water. Easy workers are hard drinkers always."

Before the morning was over, at least half the company had done their day's work. At dinner-time only six decided to return to the hay-field. The others were "bound to have a bath in the river." — "Better all go bathing. You've worked well. I engage you again for to-morrow," said Prince. "We shall be teaming this afternoon. Don't want you any way."

So passed the last week of the home-haying. The five-acre lot on the side-hill was shaved as fine as any barber could have done it. The meadow-lot was cut, and its burthen gathered into the barn. The old medicine-chest, so called because it was full of every wild herb that grew in those parts, was harvested; and the barn could hardly contain itself with fulness. Mow and loft were running over. Biddy, whose nest was in the old hay, never saw her nest again. It was buried three loads deep. Old Bess in her stall neighed as she smelt the new hay, and even encouraged her colt to try its flavor. "Bright and sweet," was the verdict of everybody on that year's hay. "Just Prince's kind," said Aunty proudly, "bright and sweet."

"Well, they do say I'm very like my mother."

"Don't believe 'em, Prince: they only say it to flatter you," says Aunty, laughing like a flapping

sail just before it sets, and speeds away across the sea. In a minute she was gone.

The boys had worked well, as Prince said, "the first half-day." After that the novelty being over, and other diversions springing up, they had fallen off. Fred and Jimmy had kept up their interest, and work longer and better than the others, excepting Ward; and it certainly looked, at the end of the week, as if one or all three of these boys would win the reward of going with Prince to the bewitching *mash*. It would take several days, at the least calculation, to cut the grass. Prince and his men would do that. But in another week the work of floating it to the landing, and teaming it home, would begin, and then what sport for somebody!

Ward told Fred about it as they worked together in the field, turning hay, and raking after, until he was wild to go. It took three able-bodied men besides himself, Matthew said, to manage that flat-boat. Sometimes she would run into the soft bank, in spite of all they could do; and then it was like drawing off a tight boot, to get her free again. Sometimes they came to shallow places, and it was just touch and go with them to get over. He remembered one place, where they passed a sandy beach; they all jumped overboard, and pushed the boat with their shoulders. Get wet? Of course, up to his armpits; but didn't

mind that. "Ought to have seen the manhaden. I tell you they were thick! Big schools of them on the flats! Chased 'em by the hundred, and almost made some of them leap upon the shore. Might have done it easy enough. Only wouldn't pay. Not fit to eat, you know. Only catch 'em to make oil."

What sort of a place was the *mash?*

Oh! level, decidedly, and moist in places. Never sunk in above his knees, that he remembered. Pretty heavy work, poling salt-hay. He poled one day till the poles dropped out of his hands as if they'd been greased.

"See any turtles?"

"Not much. Not their kind of a swamp. Plenty of sand-peeps along shore, and ring-necks, and those things. Men there shooting 'em."

"Hullo, boys, lively with those rakes! We're leaving you behind."

So Prince would bring them up to their work, when their tongues went faster than their feet. But every word of Matthew Ward's account, laid in with slices of solid work, made their labor as sweet as the crust in a Saturday-pie. The work was soaked with fun. Fred was determined to earn the prize, if hard work could do it; and he really surprised Prince with his energy and constancy.

"There's something more than pulp in that boy, you may depend," was Prince's word to Aunty, speaking about Fred.

"Yes, yes, he'll make something. Aunt Massy says Fred is the only boy that takes handy to her spinning-wheel."

"I should think so, mother. You don't mean to say the old lady lets the boys meddle with her spinning!"

"Oh, yes! she likes to have them. They're company for her. Better have a broken thread now and then, with young life about you, than one long yarn all to yourself. Massy likes it."

And so she did. She used to sit at her wheel on a summer's afternoon, with a basketful of long curls of wool at her feet, and spin by the hour. Trudy, in her arm-chair by the window, would sit and doze, or knit, as the spirit moved. The locusts in the grass neither toiled nor spun, but they kept up a cheerful singing to cheer the spinners' hearts. The bees in the sunflowers sounded their bass-viols in harmony with the monotonous treble of the locusts.

Without being still, every thing was most quiet about the little room. Even the whir of Massy's spinning-wheel had a subdued sound; and at nearly every breath it stopped, as if hushed by the great peace that filled the place. It was a spot to rest a tired worker in the busy world. Fretted housekeepers in the neighborhood liked to take their sewing, and go to spend an hour or two with these good sisters. They never

argued. They were all feeling and sympathy. It did one good only to sit down in their house. Somehow, the rest and peace sank into you as you sat there. The sourest temper grew sweet under their kind looks, as the tomatoes on their window-sill ripened in the sun. Nothing came to break the quiet but flies and boys. The flies would wake Trudy out of her comfortable nap, without the least pity. The boys did the same when they came trooping into the room without warning. But there was this difference: Trudy was glad to see the boys, and she did not take that comfort in the flies. She showed how much they plagued her gentle spirit by qualifying her admiration of the world with an exception: "A beautiful world, indeed, only the flies is powerful thick in summer."

The boys were a welcome change, therefore, when they came in, as they did one afternoon at the close of the haying season. Trudy started from her doze, and slapped her cheek, as if she was sure "it was flies." Massy stopped spinning to say "How do you do?" and "Heartily welcome."

"O Aunt Massy, what jolly curls! How'd you get 'em so long? Card some, and show us, won't you?"

"Bless ye! yes, if ye want me to. Jest fetch me that basket in the corner."

The basket in the corner held a bundle of wool, and two carders. If the truth must be told, they were old and greasy and snuffy. The wool is responsible for the greasiness, and Aunt Massy must take the blame of the snuff. But it doesn't become boys who chew gum, and smoke sweet-fern cigars, to criticise Aunt Massy's one indulgence. Our boys never thought of blaming her snuff-taking. They took the old carders, and tried to card the wool, and roll it out in long curls, as she did.

Then nothing would satisfy them, but they must try their hand at spinning; and curl after curl of the carded wool was spoiled in the vain attempt to make it go.

Every failure only provoked an encouraging smile from Massy, and an invitation to try again.

"Dear me, sister! I believe you'd give 'em the hair off your head, if they wanted it," said Trudy, in an approving way, from her arm-chair.

"It 'ud be no more than you've done yourself, Trudy."

Trudy had once given the boys some false curls, — remnants of former vanity and grandeur, — because they wanted to dress up in them for some show or other.

"Well, I'm sure they were welcome, if they did 'em any good. We ain't as well off as we used to be, boys, when them curls was bought;" and Trudy sighed a long sigh.

"Now, sister, how can you say so? We have all we want, and all we ought to wish for; and we couldn't have more, if we owned a fortune."

"I know, I know. It's very wicked of me to complain; but you know, sister, we didn't always live as we do now. When parents were alive, we always had cake for supper, you must remember, and many, many comforts we can't have now."

"Why, now, Trudy, I never knew you cared for cake. You shall have some to-morrow; see if you don't. Sha'n't she, chil'ern?"

"She shall so. We'll bring her over some ourselves. Aunty Patch lets us have all we want."

The boys didn't consider that they only paid for their own board, and that they had no right to make free with Mrs. Patch's property. But they knew they were safe in making the promise. Was not Aunty always sending them over to the cottage with presents to the lone sisters?

They staid a full hour, that afternoon, fooling with one another, and bothering their kind, proud old maiden aunties by adoption, when suddenly in the distance was heard the merry tingle of bells.

"Hullo! there comes the baker!"

In an instant all the boys started like the herd of swine that ran into the sea. No one of them knew what they were going for, or what possessed them. It was a change. There was nothing remarkable in the covered wagon, with red body,

black top, and sliding drawers in the rear, to excite such an interest. Certainly Mr. Spring, the baker, would never have attracted them. His smile was like a crack in his dough, not a bit more expressive; and he always told the boys, in a gruff way, to keep off, as if he thought they wanted to steal from him. The boys swarmed about his cart as it stopped at Mrs. Patch's, and they saw Aunty buy some Roxbury crackers.

"Any cake to-day, Miss Patch?"

"No, I thank you. We do our own baking here, Mr. Spring."

"No doubt, mum. But I put my ginger-cakes agin yours, for curing hungry boys. Only ten cents a dozen. They're fillin', very, for the price."

"Oh, I dare say! So's shavings fillin'; but 'tain't fattening, you see. No, thank you, Mr. Spring, I won't take any."

"Any nice pound-cake? just as rich as butter and sugar can make 'em. Better try a loaf."

"No, I don't want any. We're supplied."

"All right, good day! Clear the track, boys."

"Stop at Miss Wheeler's," cried several of the boys. "Aunt Trudy will take some cake."

"Yes, I guess not," said Spring. "None of your sauce, youngsters!"

The poor sisters seldom bought any thing of the baker. He did not stop there very often, and then

only when he had stale bread, which he was willing to sell cheap, or even to give away.

"No joking. We really mean it. You must stop there. Trudy said she wanted some cake. We'll pay for it! Come, fellows, let's stand treat, and give 'em a pound-cake for supper."

Aunty laughed such a hearty laugh, and looked so much pleased at their generous proposal, that every boy agreed at once to it; and Spring consented to stop at the poor little cottage.

"Goodness me, Massy! here's the baker at our door. What can he want?" said Trudy as the cart came jingling to the front step, and stopped.

"Nothin' to-day, Mr. Spring," said Massy coming to the door.

"But these boys say you want some cake. I've got some prime pound-cake to-day. Only fifty cents a loaf."

"Sakes alive! Mr. Spring, the boys are playing jokes on you: the dear little fellows is so full of life! You mustn't mind 'em, Mr. Spring."

But, instead of driving on, down gets the baker, goes round to the hind-drawers of his cart, unfastens the bar, — *open sesame!* and out comes a magnificent pound-cake, done to perfection, and shaped like Round Hill.

"That's for you, Aunt Massy; that's for you and Aunt Trudy. We pay for it, you know. All right, Mr. Spring! Just lay it on the table. Here's

your money!" And, before the good old ladies could recover from their surprise, Spring had driven off. "Jingle, jingle, jingle!" went the baker's bells as he rattled briskly away.

"Jolly, jolly, jolly!" went all the boys' hearts, as they ran laughing and shouting away before they could receive any thanks.

"Bless 'em," said Massy, as she turned toward her little room; and the two old women fairly cried for joy. "'Tain't the cake, you see, sister: it's the goodness o' those boys."

"Yes, Massy; and it's all o' God's goodness that we knowed 'em."

CHAPTER XIV.

MISCHIEF.

IT certainly does not look as if Solon and Lysander Wilkins had done our boys much harm with their demoralizing stories.

"Well done, boys!" cried Aunty, as she watched them running away from Massy's cottage, and caught the happy look of their faces. "I like that," she said to herself as she went about her work. "They shall have an extra plum in their pudding for that. Let's see! What nice thing can I stir up for supper? Sally-Lunn. That's the ticket. They'd eat themselves blind on Sally-Lunn if I'd let them. Well, I don't care if they do eat themselves to sleep with it. They shall have all they want to-night."

I forgot to say, that when Prince made his discovery of a gold-mine in the hay-field, and announced it to the boys, he formed what he called a joint-stock company, after the most approved business-fashion. All the boys were to take shares, paying nothing for them, except their

labor, which he knew would be rather less than nothing. Poor Aunty was to be the outside party, not in the ring, — from whom all the supplies were to come, and to whom none of the profits would be likely to go.

She, however, was a very ready victim. Any thing to get the young folks pleasantly occupied. The name of this corporation was the "Precious Gold, Hay, and Stubble Mining Company." Prince named it. The boys took a thousand shares each, and pledged themselves to mutual helpfulness. Each was to stand by the other in good report and evil report; and a fair share of the profits was to be each boy's reward. No member could withdraw without the consent of the others; and any revelation of the plans or doings of the firm would be considered a breach of confidence.

Prince little thought, when he was tying up this great concern with all the bands of secrecy, and all the guards of personal obligation, that he was making a company which might be used as powerfully for evil as for good. He took his idea from the newspapers, and the little he knew about the partnerships of the great world of speculation; and it was part of the joke to make this boy-company as much like real mining companies as he could. So long as he was at home, and acting as confidential adviser, there could be no harm in it. Nor was the innocent enterprise of turning grass into

marketable produce likely to lead to any corruption.

But, the very week after the home-haying was over, Prince had to go to Clam Cove to cut the marsh-hay. He was gone several days. Meantime the company remained in existence with no active employment. "What to do?" was the pressing question. Haying was practically over for most of them; and there was the organization alive, and out of business. Nobody wanted to return to the make-believe game around the old elm. A taste of real business had made such child's-play contemptible. There was nothing to be gained in fishing-excursions. They had tried that, and only lost their bait and their patience alike. Berrying was past; at least, the high blackberries were too far away for their picking. There was wood-cutting; but there's no fun in that. Weeding, too, was dull sport. Their season was too short for cattle-raising, or they might have tried that.

"I say, fellows, let's filibuster," said Ward one afternoon when the full board was in session out in the barn.

As none of the boys knew what "filibuster" meant, Ward explained that it was a way people had of getting more land; "just go and take it, you know, and then, if the owners can't drive you off, you keep it."

"Like to see you try that on, Ward. Golly! wouldn't Maria Jane's father be after us with a sharp stick if we 'filibustered' on his land? We might take poor Aunt Massy's garden, if we were mean enough to try; but we won't do that."

"Who wants you to? wait till you're asked. I don't mean to take anybody's land. There's other things besides land. Suppose we *filibustered* in somebody's garden. Perhaps we might find some watermelons: who knows?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed half a dozen boys, remembering Wilkins' story. "That would be fun, wouldn't it?"

"But that's st"—

"Stealing," Fred was about to say, when another laugh drowned the word, and the whole company seemed filled with the spirit of mischief.

"Where can we go, Ward? Who's got any melons?"

"Oh, plenty of them round! Or we might go for pears or peaches, or something else."

But pears and peaches were not ripe; neither were melons, when the boys came to think of it. What should they do? In their eagerness to do something, and something spiced with mischief, they were ready for almost any thing. I am not sure but they would have decided to go forth and tear down walls and fences, if nothing more profitable had offered. Any thing for fun! Suddenly,

in the midst of their conference, a sound of jingling bells was heard.

"Hurrah! there's the baker!" cries Ward. "Let's smoke old Spring!"

It was the work of an instant. Off scampered the Precious Mining Co., ready for any venture. Spring was driving up the road towards Aunty's when the boys arrived at the corner of the house. A hurried consultation settled the plan. "Here, Fred Grant, you buy a dozen Roxbury crackers for us," said Ward. "You can't object to that." He saw that Fred did not like this business. "And, while Fred is buying the crackers in front, we'll cabbage the cake behind. Come on, fellows!"

There was no time to argue or object, if any boy had wanted to: most of them were too much excited by the prospect of the daring exploit, to realize what they were doing. Fred quieted his conscience by thinking that he would have no part in the robbery, because he would be buying the crackers. O Fred, Fred! don't you know that it's stealing when you help another to steal?

No: Fred had to learn all this afterwards. No time to lose: there was the baker at the door. "We can't do it there, with Aunty looking on. I'll get him to stop at Aunt Massy's," says Ward.

The baker, nothing loath, remembering the purchase the boys had made before, stopped at Massy's

as he was requested. Fred mounted the front seat, and ordered a dozen Roxbury crackers. The crackers were in a barrel behind the front seat. It so happened that the stock was low, and Spring had to dive deep into the barrel to get them. It took him quite a while, therefore, to pick up the dozen; and then one of the other boys came, and ordered another dozen. This gave the conspirators in the rear all the time they wanted. There was a rank growth of camomile-flowers by the roadside near the cottage; and the young pirates threw their plunder into this. Two or three loaves of pound and cup cake, and a dozen jumbles, more or less, went plunging in among the camomile-weeds; and then the drawer was closed, and the bar replaced.

"Any cake to-day, young gentlemen?" said Spring, with that dough-faced smile of his.

"No, thank you; we're supplied to-day," says Matt very coolly.

"Cake's extra good to-day, — fresh baked, going rapidly. Hadn't you better take a loaf for the old ladies?"

"No, guess not to-day: we've bought the crackers for them."

"Well, good-day, then. I must be getting along. Just as well you don't want that cake to-day: I hardly know how to spare it. My customers will be sure to want it."

"Hope it won't hurt 'em any," says Matt.

"No danger of that, sir," says Spring, quite high and mighty.

"Not much," says Ward, so dryly, and with such a cool impudence, that the other boys could hardly keep themselves from rolling on the grass, and hooting aloud.

I believe they did indulge in some such caper when Spring was out of sight. Then they got up, searched for the cake, carried it secretly to the barn, ate two or three pieces of it, tried to laugh and joke over it, found the effort harder every time, then began to stop eating. Somehow the cake didn't taste as they thought it would. They could have better cake than that, any time, for the asking.

What should they do with it?

"Nasty stuff, any way!"

"Give it to the pigs."

"No: somebody might see us, or find stray pieces."

"Hide it, and have another feast to-morrow!"

Not they. They had had all they wanted of it.

"Take it to the house. The hired men would eat it. Make Aunty think we bought it." — "No, there's no deceiving her!" — "Besides," says Fred, "it's bad enough to steal, without lying about it."

"You get out, Grant," says Ward: "none of that talk."

But that talk happened to be exactly what every boy really thought; and the truth cannot be bullied down. Fred's outspoken word broke the spell under which they had been acting; and they all declared they wished old Spring had his cake back, and would keep it to himself. They wouldn't touch another atom of it.

"I have it, fellows!" said Jimmy. "Let's bury the broken bits out of sight, and take the whole cakes over to Aunt Massy. She won't ask questions; and, besides, she would be glad to get it."

"That's the thing to do," said Tom Smith. "Don't you remember the way Robin Hood and his merry-men used to do? They took things from rich folks, and gave 'em to the poor. That's not so bad, now. Aunt Massy needs that cake more than old Spring does, I'm sure."

"Good! let's do that." It suited everybody but Ward, who preferred to destroy all evidence of the theft; but he was overruled, so strong was the wish to make some reparation for the wrong they secretly knew they had done. So all the boys went in a body to the poor old lady's cottage, and asked her to accept the cakes. She and Trudy were too thankful to speak at first. With tears in their eyes, they thanked the dear young gentlemen, and wished they had any thing to give them in return. "Ain't there some sweet-boughs or summer-Harveys, out under the apple-trees, sis-

ter?" says Trudy. "I'm sure the boys would like an apple. Now, wouldn't ye, boys?"

There was no denying that they would. But, oh! I doubt if Adam himself ever felt more wretched and sinful and mean than we did that afternoon, when those good old women were giving us their best fruit in return for our stolen cake; and calling us "dear boys," and "nice young gentlemen, I'm sure," and "clever little fellows," now, to be going and spending our pocket-money for poor critters like them, "as wasn't worthy of the least of God's marcies."

Merciful heavens! didn't we know that we weren't worthy to touch the hem of their old calico gowns, the saints? and didn't we get out of that house, and away from their praises, as fast as we decently could?

"Oh, dear! I wish we hadn't done it," whispered Fred to Jimmy.

"So do I, but it can't be helped. No use crying about it. Don't think any more about it."

"Hi! let's leap-frog," said one of the fellows when they got into the road; and, suiting the action to the word, he bent over, and stood with hands on knees, ready for the leapers. On they came with a laugh, a scream, and a bound, — one leaping clear, another scraping, another pitching sidewise, but all getting over; and thus they tried to run away from their shame.

"Come, boys, come to supper," cried Aunty's cheerful voice from the window. "Berry-cake, boys! Berry-cake! No butter for the last comer!"

How we all chased! Poor Simpson tripped up, and came limping in behind. "Well, never mind, Simpson, you shall have sugar on your cake." Aunty was a terrible disciplinarian, you see.

"There, boys, I made this cake o' purpose to please you, because you were so kind to the old girls. I heard you tell Spring to stop there, and I went right off, and told Maria Jane to run and pick the berries; and here they are, made into cakes, with all their bloom on 'em. Goodness, boys, how you have heated yourselves! You're as red in the face as the old turkey-gobbler!"

Ah! it wasn't the leap-frog or the run that reddened our faces. We hadn't succeeded in running away from our shame, after all. It was blazing in our cheeks, worse than ever. It fairly burned the cakes we tried to eat.

"What's the matter? Ain't the cakes good to-night? I made 'em extra nice," says Aunty, looking troubled at our want of appetite.

"Oh, yes; splendid!" And then we all ate as if for dear life.

"I wish Prince would come home," says Aunty. "You boys haven't any thing to do, now haying's over. If Prince were at home, he should take you

all on a picnic to Pleasant Pond to-morrow. You shall go as soon as he gets back for good. How should you like to go with me, and pick blackberries to-morrow afternoon? We can harness old Bess into the hay-cart, and all go together. We might stop on the way home, and make a call on Cousin Orissa. No doubt you'd like to see Soly and Lysander again."

The boys were all ready to say they would like to go above all things; but, at the mention of the Wilkinses, they stopped short.

"Why, what's the matter with 'em? I guess 'twon't hurt you to say, 'How d'ye do' to 'em, anyway. Orissa thinks her Lysander is a nonesuch."

"We don't like him," said Fred.

"Why not, Fred? Has he done any thing agin' any of you boys? If he has, I won't have him darken my doors again."

"No, oh, no! He hasn't done any thing to us; only — we don't like him."

"But why not?"

"Because," said Simpson, "because he wanted us to take Prince's sole-leather; and, besides, he st — Oh!"

A timely kick again stopped Simpson's babbling tongue, but Aunty's ears were open.

"Well, well, I don't want to hear any tales. I don't know as I like Lysander very well myself,

so we won't stop there. The boy that begins with stealing leather will steal shoes next thing, and end in the jail. I won't have my boys keeping company with folks that take what don't belong to 'em. Pass round the cake, Maria Jane!"

It was home-made gingerbread, crisp and fresh. It snapped like a pipe-stem when you broke it.

"Help yourselves, don't be afraid: plenty more in the stone-jar. You know where that is, I'll be bound. That gingerbread, now, is the real thing: none of Spring's wishy-washy fixings. Wonder what you'd say if I fed you on his ginger-cakes, instead of making snaps for you. Think you'd like it?"

"Oh, no!" the boys hated his stuff: hoped she would never get any of it for them.

They told the truth that time.

Aunty was in her liveliest mood that evening. Pleased with the boys because, as she supposed, they had been kind and generous to the poor; pleased with her supper, which certainly couldn't have been better if the Queen of England had been expected to drop in with her daughters, and take tea,—she sparkled and beamed upon her young family like the big "diamond of a woman" that she was. That was Aunt Massy's name for her.

It was impossible to resist the charm of her fun and kindliness; and when, of her own accord, after supper she volunteered to pop some corn for

the boys, or let them pop it for themselves, all the smoke seemed to have flown away up the chimney, and there was nothing but clean coals of comfort left. Every thing was forgotten but the lively business of the hour. The big fireplace swarmed with eager faces. Aunty sat in the midst of her buzzing brood, like a queen of the bees. Some shelled the corn, some blew the coals, some shook the popper, some sprinkled the salt when the corn was popped. All ate it, and as much as they liked of it. But, when all were satisfied, there was so much left in the great brown-bread pan, that Aunty said she would make some corn-balls. They would be good to take on their berry-party the next day.

"Capital! just the thing!" agreed everybody. And so, in spite of the warmth of the evening, and the added warmth of superintending this noisy crowd, and her weariness after a hard day's work, Aunty Patch put on the saucepan, and soon had it full of simmering sirup. "Now, young bears, keep your fingers out of that, or you'll get burned."

But what bear, or boy, — same thing, — ever learned any thing without burning his fingers?

First one would try, and then another, thinking the sirup had cooled; and then how they howled and danced!

"There, Maria Jane, bring a big baking-pan.

The boys will have no fingers left to pick berries with to-morrow, at this rate."

The corn-balls were made in the most approved manner; and the boys went to bed that night with their eyes almost as big as the tempting comfits they had been looking at.

"There, go right to sleep, and be on your best behavior to-night, boys. Prince said he trusted in your honor, you know, when he was going away. Good-night, and pleasant dreams!"

"We'll be still: you see," said the boys, as they filed up the narrow stairway to bed. Was there one of them who was not thinking to himself, "Prince trusts in our honor! a pretty return we've made for his trust"?

Nothing was said aloud. The boys were very tired, and everybody seemed anxious to get to sleep. They were in bed in an uncommonly short time. When Aunty came up to put out the light, and see that all was safe for the night, she found them very quiet.

"Here's another pail of water I've brought you for the morning. Clean hands and pure hearts go together, children. There, now you're all right."

She put out the light.

Oh the darkness of darkness after wrong-doing! More than one boy felt it that night.

"The Lord be with you, children!" and Aunty shut the door.

It never was so hard to go to sleep before. "Jimmy," whispered Fred to his bedfellow, "Jimmy!"

"What say?"

"Can you get to sleep?"

"No."

"What's the matter?"

"You keep talking to me."

Ah, Jimmy, Jimmy! it isn't Fred that keeps talking to you.

CHAPTER XV.

CONSEQUENCES.

"DEAR me! What a world of care boys are," said Aunty Patch to herself that night, as she went to her room. "Now, if Prince was only here, I shouldn't mind it. He always knows how to handle 'em. Dear me! I wonder what's up."

She didn't consider that Prince himself was no more than a boy a very few years back. She often called him a big boy now. And yet what a world of comfort she took in Prince! She wished he would come home "now, this very minute." But she knew he wouldn't. The next night was the very earliest she could expect him; and then it would depend on the weather, and his success in making the salt-hay.

Well, the berry-party would help fill up the time, and the boys could go to the river in the morning. She would have an early dinner so as to start the sooner. She couldn't tell what made her feel so "down." Something in her bones told

her when a storm was coming. But that was rheumatism. Something in her heart told her that a storm was brewing in her little household. What was that? "Dear me, I wish Prince would come!"

And yet there was nothing on the surface to excite her fears, — nothing worse than a momentary lull in the boys' appetite for berry-cake. Likely as not, they had been stuffing themselves with apples. She laughed at herself for letting such trifles affect her. As for the Wilkins boys, she ought to feel thankful that her boys did not like their company. The signs were good, rather than bad; and yet she felt troubled, and rose the next morning with a dim sense of something going wrong.

Work and will, however, overcame her doubts; and when she started off with all her "world of care" in a hay-cart, and saw so many merry faces full of health and enjoyment, she really forgot her premonition of coming trouble, and was the brightest of the company.

"Can you boys stay put? or shall I take a pitchfork with me?"

This was her starting admonition. The hay-cart was not used to a moving freight, and Aunty knew neither the cart nor Black Bess could endure an uneasy burden.

The boys promised to "stay put." But Bes-

sie's colt would have kept that promise quite as well as they did. Every step of the way, they were in motion on their own account. They hadn't gone forty rods before they wanted to stop, and pick up some early apples that had dropped into the road. At the steep pitch a mile farther, Aunty was glad to have them get out and walk, to relieve the horse. But, once out, needles or quicksilver would not be harder to pick up again.

"Come, come, boys! it'll be next year's crop before we get to those blackberries! Hurry up!"

And so by dint of coaxing, scolding, good-natured railing, and cracking of the whip over their shoulders, the passengers were taken on board again, and on they went.

On past snug little farmhouses, tanned as red as the sun and red paint together could make them, sheltered by big trees, and trimmed with country flowers around the underpinning; past nut-trees with branches hanging over into the road, everybody's property in their season; past fields where cows and calves were peacefully grazing; past pine-woods sending spicy breezes after them; past the brook that made such a splendid cascade farther down, all bubbling with amber and silver waters between the weedy banks, where the red cardinal-flower bloomed, and the pearly orchis kept its dewy

freshness through the long summer days; on past the plain-faced schoolhouse, happily shut that afternoon. "Hurrah for old Colburn and the school-marm!" sung the boys as they passed it; on past the old mansion-house of Squire Kennedy, with its ancestral box overrun with irrepressible tiger-lilies, and its look of desolated grandeur; on, and on, and on, past so many bright and beautiful things, now, alas! all past. But why do I say all past, when I might this very day ride over that road, and find the nut-trees as full as ever, or new ones in their places, the brook still rippling on, and the apples falling over the wall, as of yore? Yes, yes; but the boys would not be there, and Aunty.

But this is no part of my story.

Enough, we had a good time, a grand time, a successful time. All the pails filled, and all the mouths besides; and it would not be possible to tell how much pain, how much grief, how much fun, how much healthy, hearty enjoyment, came out of that one berry-party.

"Hasn't Prince come, Maria Jane?" says Aunty, as she drew Bess up by the front door on our return.

"No, mum."

"Dear me, how late he makes it! Here, take the berries, child. Boys, tumble out!" No need to say that: they were already out. "Matthew, you may put the horse up. Tim's milking, I suppose. Dear me! what can have got Prince?"

Prince did not return until the next evening. Meantime, something happened.

The boys had gone to the river, the morning after the berry-party, all but Fred. Something kept him at home. He never knew what. He only knew he didn't care to go to the river. He was up in the big sleeping-room, half dozing on his bed, for he got very little sleep the night before. He was not happy. He did not feel satisfied with himself. It was of no use saying that he didn't take the cake. He helped the others to take it. He had eaten some of it, with the rest. "Receiver's as bad as the thief." He had heard that said. Now he knew it. "Bother! I wish I could sleep."

But he couldn't.

"Any way, we didn't eat much of it. Aunt Massy got it, and she deserved it."

No use! Her deserts did not make Fred deserving.

"Well, we didn't want the thing, any way. 'Twasn't stealing: it was only play, just a little sky-larking. Prince was always saying, 'Boys will be boys.'"

Yes; but Prince never said, "Boys will be thieves." Aunty said, "Boys that are thieves will be jail-birds some day."

"Oh, bother! I wish I could sleep!"

Just then a sound greeted Fred's ear, — a sound

that was like a knell. Not in itself: nothing could be more jolly than the sound of jingling bells; but Fred knew in a moment that it was the baker coming, and that made the difference.

Fred leaped from his bed, and peeped through the window, behind the curtain. Yes, there was the baker's cart coming up the road, and Spring driving.

"What's he coming here, at this time of day, for? Perhaps he isn't coming here! Perhaps he'll drive by!"

Fred watched.

No: he drove straight up to the front-door, and got out.

"Bang, bang, bang!" went his whip-handle on the door.

"Mercy on us! Mr. Spring, save the pieces!" says Aunty, coming from the kitchen, with her sleeves rolled up, and her hands and wrists just out of the dough. She looked as if she would like to put them into Spring's mean old face, and he prudently stopped his banging on the instant.

"What brings you round at this time of day, Mr. Spring? Want to buy some of my cake, I suppose, to peddle out. No, thank you. We eat as we go, here; nothing over, nothing under. Just a pattern, every day."

"Yis'm, yis'm, that's our way too. Leavings ain't selling-stock, no ways. But I've come round

to say that our baking fell short of a pattern last day as I was here, — day afore yesterday; and I thought I'd jest see if you knew any thing about it."

"I know any thing about it, Mr. Spring! How should I know any thing about your bakings? I have enough to do to take care of my own, 'thout putting my fingers into other folks' dough!"

"Yis'm, yis'm! I know! But our baking fell short som'ers near your house, and I thought I'd ask if you knew any thing about it."

"Near my house, Mr. Spring! What do you take me for? You don't mean to say that you think" —

Here Aunty looked so very wrathful, and at the same time so very strong in the arms, that Spring hurried to explain.

"Oh, no, mum! no, mum! I only wanted to tell you that somehow I lost two fine loaves of pound-cake, one of cup-cake, and some jumbles, between your house and Miss Limes'. I know I had 'em when I stopped at your door; and, when I stopped at her'n, they was gone: that's all."

"Oh! that's all, is it?" said Aunty; "and you come to ask me how you came to lose your cakes, hey? Well, through your stupidity, I suppose. You must have left your bar loose, and the cakes jumped out."

"No; for I found the drawers shut, and the bar all fast."

Aunty stopped a minute.

"Did you stop anywhere on your way between my house and Miss Limes'?"

"Only a minute at Massy Wheeler's, to leave some crackers."

"You don't think Massy stole 'em, I suppose?"

"No: she couldn't 'a' done it. 'Tain't possible. Ain't spry enough on her legs."

"Oh! that's all that hinders, you think? Perhaps Trudy did it."

"Now, Miss Patch, you know she can hardly get out of her chair. How could she?"

"Sure enough: she couldn't, could she? Well, perhaps you think I run over, and took 'em."

"Oh, no, mum! Never thought o' such a thing!" said Spring.

Better not. He would have left that door quicker than he entered it, if he had.

"What do you think, then? Come, out with it!"

"Well, I really don't know what to think. Boys are sometimes a little mischievous, you know, Miss Patch. I didn't know but what"—

Here Spring paused, warned by Aunty's eye and arm: not that either eye or arm moved. She was as still as a stone, with arms folded, and eyes fixed on Spring's face.

"You didn't know but what?" said Aunty.

"I don't say they did it, but they might, you know; and"—

"Mr. Spring," said Aunty (Fred fairly trembled as he heard her), "my boys are gentlemen!"

And with that Aunty marched back into her kitchen as proud as Lucifer, and as good as Michael, at the same time.

Spring mounted his cart, and drove off again, muttering that he would get it out of those young scamps some day, — see if he didn't! He wasn't going to "lose a dollar and seventy-five cents, jest for nothin', any way."

He said this in such a loud voice, as if he wanted Mrs. Patch to hear him, that Fred heard him distinctly.

"A dollar and seventy-five cents!" That, then, was the amount of the robbery. A large sum to Fred, especially when he had used all his bank-money in the hen-business, and had spent his last penny in the purchase of the Roxbury crackers.

If he had possessed the money, I believe he would have run after the baker, and given it all to him, and asked him not to say any more about it. Such a sacrifice of money would have been an easy way out of his trouble. Of course, he would only have confirmed Spring's suspicions, if he had done this. Perhaps Spring would believe that he had done it all by himself, when really he liked to think he had had less to do with it than the other boys.

But there was no use in thinking about it, any way. He hadn't the money. Spring had gone: the last jingle of his bells died away in the distance, and with it died all hope of helping matters in that way.

Fred threw himself on his bed again, more unhappy than ever. But grief always makes people tired, through the goodness of Him who made us, and Fred soon fell asleep. He was roused by the ringing of the dinner-bell, and the shouts of the young lions, i.e., the boys, roaring for their prey. They had passed the morning at the river; had paddled about in "Old Tarsides," and taken a bath, and come home through Rice's orchard, where they found lots of apples on the ground. Rice allowed them to help themselves to windfalls.

"You're sure of that, boys?" says Aunty.

"Oh, yes! we asked him."

"Of course none of my boys would take what didn't belong to them." And such a proud smile lighted up the face of that dearest and honestest old Aunty of ours, that we all felt like the sinners we were, and hid our faces in our plates with such voracity that there was no fault found with our appetites that day.

That evening Prince came home.

"Goodness, Prince, how glad I am to see you!"

"Nothin' like scarcity to put up a fellow's price, mother."

"Have you been well?"

"Never better."

"Sleep warm nights?"

"Hard not to in August, mother."

"Well, then, did you sleep cool?"

"Oh, yes! with a sea-breeze for a blanket."

"Well, I *am* glad to see you."

"Well, now, that's clever. I ain't sorry to see you. Any thing up, mother? How's the pirates?"

"Prince, I forbid your speaking so of the young gentlemen."

"Oh! here come the young gentlemen. They can speak for themselves."

I should think so. A pack of wolves couldn't have made more noise than the boys did when they saw Prince.

"Hullo, Prince! Hullo, old fellow! When did you get here? What you brought? Any thing for us? When you going again?"

"Right off," says Prince, running down the road as if for dear life.

"Stop him! Catch him! After him! At him!"

Away went the young gentlemen. But Prince was too much for them. After leading them a useless chase down the road, and over two fences, he came running back to the house, sat down on the door-step; and, as the boys came panting up to him, he cried out, —

"Hullo! When d'ye come? When you going agin? Ha, ha!"

"Come straight in and get some supper, Prince. I know you're hungry."

"Well, I don't mind eating an ox or two, if you've got 'em all cooked," says Prince.

"I've a great mind to take you at your word, and kill our yoke."

"Oh, no, you needn't! I'll take half a dozen boys instead. I ain't hungry."

And Prince seized two of the boys nearest him, as if he would make his threat good.

"Come along, no time to lose! Berry-cake cooling."

Prince dropped the boys, and rushed. On the whole, he preferred the cake. "I like cake; don't you, youngsters?"

What made Prince ask that question? Did he know any thing of their secret? How could he? Just home; no boy would tell him; nobody else knew it, unless — unless old Spring had been round. Prince might have met him on the road; but then, old Spring didn't know that they had taken his cake.

His question received no answer; but Prince was not surprised at that. It was a superfluous question.

Aunty, however, noticed the boys' hesitation, and did not like it.

By and by, after plaguing Prince, and trying to find out when he would go to *mash* again, the boys went to bed.

Mother and son were then left to themselves in the big kitchen.

"Dear me! I'm glad you're home again, Prince."

"So am I, mother."

"I never wanted you so much."

"Why, what's up, mother? Any thing gone wrong? Boys been stepping into a puddle, and soiling their pretty shoes?"

"Worse than that, I'm 'feared."

Aunty looked so really serious, that her son ceased his habitual joking, and asked in earnest if any thing troubled her.

Then she told him about Spring's call that morning, and how she had been feeling it in her heart that something was wrong. Of course she didn't let Spring see that she believed a word of his insinuations; but she feared there might be something in it, after all.

"Don't be troubled, marmy. Bakers never count right; baker's dozen, you know! More'n likely old Spring thought he had more cakes than he really had."

"I'm afraid not. He would hardly get three loaves out of the way in pound-cake."

"Well, don't you worry, any way; I'll fix it. I sha'n't go to mash again before next week. The

hay's all cocked. I'll see to it: don't you worry, marmy!"

"To think o' their taking that stuff o' Spring's when they can have all they want of the real thing at home!"

"Oh, they didn't do it! Don't think it!"

"I don't know: it looks pretty black."

"Oh, fudge! Spring put too much rising into his cakes; and they jest riz up, and flew away, when he opened his drawer!"

"All you know about it, Prince! They don't put rising into pound-cake."

"Oh! don't they? Well, then, that won't do. You don't suppose the pound-cake was so slim that it dried up to the size of a jumble, and got mixed in with them, do you?"

"Don't joke: it is too serious a matter."

"Where did you say the stuff was lost?"

"Between our house and Miss Limes'."

"And Spring says he didn't stop anywhere by the way?"

"Nowhere, except at Massy's house."

"H'm! and where was the boys when he stopped here?"

"Playing around. They asked him to stop at Massy's; and I supposed they meant to buy something for her, as they did before. I was so pleased to think of that, that I went right off and stirred up an extra fine berry-cake for supper. So I didn't

see what went on at Massy's; but, when the boys came in to supper, they seemed queer-like, and didn't care for the berry-cake, anyhow."

"That's a bad sign," said Prince. "No boy with a good conscience despises berry-cake."

"That's what I thought."

"Well, well, never you mind: I'll tree this mischief in a day or two. Don't fret! Good-night, marmy!"

"I'm so glad you're home again, Prince! Boys are such a world o' care!"

"Guess you learned that afore to-day, mother."

"Well, you were a beater for mischief, Prince. Good-night!"

Meanwhile Fred was telling the boys up stairs what he had overheard in the morning. Old Spring suspected them, had told Aunty about it, and she had sent him "spinning."

"Bully for her!" said Matt.

But he had gone off threatening to have it out of the boys. He wasn't going to "lose a dollar and seventy-five cents for nothing!"

"Like to see him do it. He can't prove any thing. Nobody saw us," says Ward.

"But suppose Aunty asks us about it?"

"Oh! you leave me to answer. She can't get round me."

"You'll have to lie," said Fred.

"You'd better mind how you call me a liar, Grant. I won't stand it!"

Fred kept still, but Ward's threat did not change his mind.

"Suppose Aunty should ask Aunt Massy about it?" says Jimmy.

"Well, she'll say we gave her cake. So we did. Can't we say we bought it?"

"But that would be lying," said Fred.

Ward struck Fred across the mouth. Fred kicked Ward, and there would have been a miserable row if the other boys had not prevented it.

"I hear Prince coming," cried Harry Smith.

At this they all hurried off their clothes, and rushed for their beds. Prince stopped to lock the front-door, and then came up, and put out the light.

"No hay nor nothin' up here that needs turning over, is there?" says Prince.

"No, thank you! Guess not. Stump you to do it, any way," said one of the boys.

Prince stretched forth his hand in the direction of the last speaker; and all that the boys heard out of the darkness was a clap like thunder, and a muttering and whining after it.

"Jove! they shall have it all round, if I find out they've been stealing Spring's cake," said Prince to himself as he went down stairs.

CHAPTER XVI.

FRED'S RESOLVE.

THE next morning, before the boys were up, Prince went over to the cottage. Massy and Trudy were just taking breakfast. It was an easy task. Their meals were not luxurious. But there were signs of uncommon richness in this morning's feast. Roxbury crackers, on a plate by themselves, took the shine quite off the poor loaf of stale bread, their usual provender; and then on Trudy's plate was a slice of Mr. Spring's best cup-cake. Prince knew it as soon as he saw it.

"So, ho!" he said, "you're getting quite extravagant in your old age, Trudy. Cup-cake for breakfast! Doubt if they live like that even at Mr. Rich's in the city."

"O Mr. Patch! it's my fault," says Massy. "I give it to her, because I knew she liked somethin' daintiful, you know; and it never cost us nothin'."

"How's that? Mr. Spring been turning philanthropical all to once, and giving you cake for nothin'?"

"Oh, no! not that! though he's very good, I'm sure; lets us have our bread half-price, if we take it a bit old. What do we care? It's more like us ef it's old, you know. That nice tea you sent us makes the bread as tender as can be, Mr. Patch. But it's them dear boys, as give us the cake. Bless 'em! they'd spend their last penny on us, I do believe! I've been a-meaning to tell you and Miss Patch, so ez not to have 'em waste their money on us undesarving critters."

"Couldn't do better with their money, Massy; don't stop them. So they bought that cake for you. Dare say they bought you two or three at a time; just like them: never think of it's drying up. Cake never dries up at our house."

"Oh, no! one's more than Trudy can eat; and I don't need it. But they gave us these crackers with the cake, and some jumbles."

"That was thoughtful of 'em. Pretty good boys, as boys go; don't you think so?"

Prince left the old ladies exhausting their stock of complimentary adjectives in praise of the young gentlemen.

"Wonder what they did with the other loaves of cake. Eat 'em, perhaps. That would be almost as bad as stealing 'em, when they could get snaps for the asking," mused Prince as he walked homeward.

Later in the forenoon, as he was working in the

barn, he noticed the hens in the barnyard very cross and stingy over something which they had scratched up. It was nothing unusual; but something made Prince go and see what was up. It was a piece of pound-cake.

"So, ho! that's where it went. Well, I'm glad they didn't eat it!"

At dinner-time Prince, coming in for a moment, found them talking about the picnic Aunty had promised them.

"Can you go to-morrow, Prince?" says Aunty.

"Perhaps so; if the 'Mining Co.' will help me weed garden this afternoon."

The boys agreed.

"What's the 'Precious Gold, Hay, and Stubble Mining Co.' been about since I have been gone, I wonder?"

This was said as they were all at work among the potatoes that afternoon.

"Nothin' in particular," was Ward's answer.

"Ain't struck any new vein, then?"

"No: nothing since the hay."

"Suppose you take the hens into the firm."

"What do you mean? Go into the poultry-business?"

"Oh, no! don't do it," says Fred. "Jimmy and I tried it in Jeruh. We couldn't make it go."

"I don't mean that," says Prince: "I mean take the hens into the firm as stockholders, you know."

"You get out, Prince: you're always chaffing."

"No: really, the hens have struck a new vein, that ought to be profitable. I saw 'em this morning eating pound-cake, which they'd dug up in the barn-yard. Don't cut those potatoes, Ward!"

The boys, who were all curiosity a moment before, now worked like moles. They would have given any thing, at that moment, if they could only have got under ground as easily as moles do. Ward showed his confusion by nearly cutting up a hill of potatoes.

At last he said very coolly, "Oh, yes! that's some we threw there. Some of Spring's. We got it of him; but we couldn't eat it, you know,—nasty stuff!"

Prince was on the point of saying, "Perhaps that's the reason you gave it to Aunt Massy," but he checked himself. He had said enough to feel satisfied that the boys knew what had become of the baker's missing cake. He did not wish to push them to confession. He preferred they should repent, and make it right of their own accord.

That night there was another meeting of the members of the Co., and an anxious consultation as to their condition and prospects.

Some were sure Prince knew all about it. "Nonsense," said Ward: "I made that all right."

"You needn't think you can cheat him so easy as that," said Fred.

"Who wants to cheat, Grant? I only tried to put him off the scent."

Now, I ask you to notice that in all this wretched business, of which Matthew Ward was the prime mover, he has not once called things by their right names. When he started the boys on their piratical expedition, he called it "*filibustering;*" when he led them to the attack on Spring's wagon, he said, "Let us *smoke* the baker;" and now he calls *cheating* "putting a man off the scent." The boys would have been as indignant as anybody, if they had been asked to steal or lie or cheat. And yet this is exactly what they were doing under false names.

"Matt didn't tell a lie, Fred. He only said we got the cake of Spring, and so we did," said Jack Hale.

"I don't call it getting cake of Spring, when Spring didn't know we'd got it."

"Never mind what you call it, Grant. You needn't call it at all. I do the talking for this company," said Matt.

"Yes, Matthew's our lawyer," said Jimmy; "or, as Tim says, 'our lyar.'"

"Look out what you say, Pratt, or I'll make you lie where you won't want to."

"Where's that, Ward?"

"On the floor."

"Oh! didn't know but you meant in your bed," said Jimmy with provoking coolness.

Ward looked cannon-balls at Jimmy, but they didn't hit. Jimmy was taking off his shoes. Perhaps Ward was satisfied with a distant view of those shoes. He would certainly have got one of them, if he had struck Jimmy.

Somehow the knowledge of their common fault had made all the boys savage.

"Well, fellows, we're all in the same boat," said Matthew. "No use in quarrelling. If you'll trust me, and let me do the talking, I'll get you ashore. But if you go putting in your oar, Simpson, or you, Fred Grant, or any of the rest of you, we'll upset: that's all."

"Yes, Ward ought to get us ashore," said Harry Smith; "he got us at sea."

"Oh, of course! Smith didn't eat any cake. I'd like to know who took the cup-cake. Perhaps Smith can tell us!"

"Stop, Ward; keep still, fellows. Suppose Prince should hear you! I'm sure I heard him coming."

All stopped to listen. False alarm! No Prince yet.

"But he must come soon. Better go to bed at once. He'll only suspect something if he finds us up and talking." So they reasoned, and all agreed to retire at once.

Prince was late that night. His mother had been sounding him down stairs, to learn what he

had discovered. He was very close about the business: wouldn't tell all he knew.

"Let 'em alone, mother, and they'll come home. They're not bad boys. I've known first-rate men raised from boys that were a heap worse than they are."

"No doubt of that. But bad men, too, have come from boys as good as they are. I don't believe in trusting human natur' out alone afore it's growed. You don't really think the boys done it, Prince?"

But Prince wasn't to be caught by any hints or questions. On general subjects, such as the trustworthiness of human nature, he was as talkative as Aunty could have desired; but, on the special subject of the robbery, he was a perfect blank. When he came up stairs that night, he had no jokes for the boys. He seemed like somebody else.

"Going to be pleasant weather for the picnic, Prince?"

"Ay, ay! All weathers are right when we are."

Who ever heard Prince moralizing like that before?

"Is it starlight?"

"Ay, ay! the weather's all right!"

"Won't it be fun, going to Pleasant Pond, Prince? What sort of a place is it?"

"Oh, a good enough place!"

"No more than that? Aunty said it was the prettiest place anywhere round. What was there in the pond?"

"Water."

"Needn't take the trouble to tell us that. What else?"

"Well, there's something very queer about that water, boys. If a man's honest, it'll float him like a cork; but, if he's dishonest, he sinks in it like a stone. Wouldn't advise any boy to go in swimming there, unless he's got a whole skin."

The boys inwardly resolved that they would not try the swimming next day, — at least, not beyond their depth.

"I'm sure Prince knows something," whispered Fred to Jimmy, after he had shut the door.

"Shouldn't wonder! Can't help it! No use borrowing trouble. Come, let a fellow go to sleep."

Fred lay awake, thinking, long after his companion was asleep. The more he thought, the more he disliked the last operation of the Mining Company. And yet what could he do? Ward would flog him if he told. That was nothing. He could kick back. But all the boys would blame him if he did any thing to betray the secret. He would be called a "tell-tale," the name boys most dread; and very likely none of them would ever speak to him again. If it

were only himself that had done wrong, he wouldn't have hesitated. Rather than endure the sorrow of a wounded conscience, and the hourly dread of discovery, he would go and confess all. Later in the night he was roused from a troubled sleep by a heavy clap of thunder. It was a passing shower, brief but severe. In one of the brightest flashes of lightning, Fred saw this verse, which his mother had marked in the Bible she gave him a year before: "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." What if the lightning should strike him that night? Was he ready to die? But the storm passed by, and he slept in safety till the bright sun, and the hubbub of the boys, awoke him in the morning.

"Hurrah! Splendid day? Rain last night! Who said so? I didn't hear it."

Some said one thing, and some another. Fred knew that it rained and thundered, but he said nothing. He had reason to remember it.

"Never mind! Just enough to lay the dust in the road. Woods all dry by the time we get there."

"Going, ain't you?" was the first word, as the boys came down to breakfast.

"Not this minute. Better stop to breakfast, hadn't you? Good morning, boys: where's your manners?" said Aunty.

"Oh, good morning, Aunty! good morning! We were afraid you wouldn't go to-day, because it rained last night."

"We'll see about that. Dunno' why yesterday's rain should spoil to-day's pleasure. We'll go, if Prince says so."

Prince said so, and we went. It was a day long to be remembered. If our good guardians really suspected us of wrong, they couldn't have treated us more generously than they did. I doubt if any severity would have been half as convicting to our consciences as the kindness of that best of women, and her best of sons. The way in which Aunty made a burnt-offering of herself, getting that dinner in the woods, was enough to atone for a multitude of sins, if only she had been the sinner, and not we. First the fire burned too brightly, and then the pork took fire in the frying-pan; and that was worse than the fat getting into the fire. Then the slow coals, with which she tried again, wouldn't give heat enough; and she had to blow them till her face was fairly purple with stooping over and puffing. Nothing was cooked as she wanted it. The corn burned in spots, and didn't roast through: and for once Aunty Patch's dinner was more indebted to the boys' appetite than to its own excellence. She never scolded, either, when the boys came up from the pond, with their pants and drawers wet above

the knees, — the result of their wading in for pond-lilies; and although she must have foreseen extra washing and mending, beyond calculation, in that day's pleasuring, she never uttered an impatient or foreboding word. They were off for a good time, and they shouldn't miss it through any fault of hers. Prince was a royal leader of the sport. As if to make up for last night's gloom, he was gayer than ever, and no lingering cloud showed a trace of yesterday's storm.

Nothing happened to mar the pleasure of the day, until just as they had reached Miss Limes', on their way home, whom should they meet, face to face, but Spring, the baker! He looked crosser than a mouldy crust as he passed by; and a shadow, deeper than the falling twilight, fell on the picnic party. Everybody suddenly felt tired after that. There was almost no talking, no laughing at all; and when they drove up to the door, and Maria Jane came to receive them, Aunty was glad to let her take in the things, and give the boys their supper. She only staid to take a cup of tea, give a few orders for the evening, and then went to her room, "clean tuckered out," as she expressed it.

Everybody retired early that night. The boys themselves were glad to get between the sheets. There was only time for hurried congratulations on the success of the picnic.

"Wasn't Aunty jolly? and how gay Prince was! Depend upon it, he don't suspect us," said Ward.

"Nor Aunty either?"

"No, nor she either. Suppose she'd be so funny if she had any doubt of us?"

"But that's the worst of it, Ward," said Jimmy. "It makes a fellow feel mean to be deceiving such a trump as she is."

"Yes, that's the trouble," said Fred. "Aunty looked almost ready to cry when she went to bed. You saw how still she was after we met Spring."

"Didn't Spring look savage, though?" said Jones.

"Mad enough to bite a board-nail."

"Or one of the loaves he leaves at Aunt Massy's."

"Serves him right to lose his cake, for his meanness to those old women."

"That's so!" all agreed; and it seemed to make their theft a good thing in their eyes, to think that Aunt Massy got the cake.

They soon fell asleep. Even Fred was too tired to keep awake. He dreamt he tried to swim in Pleasant Pond, and kept sinking, sinking to the bottom, because he wasn't honest.

The next morning he awoke earlier than the other boys; and, feeling restless, he arose and dressed himself, and went out of doors. Nobody was visible. The women were at work in the

pantry. Prince and the men were taking breakfast. A thin little curl of smoke, gray and scanty like one of Trudy's, was rising from the old cottage chimney. The sun was shining in the sky like twenty thousand milk-pans, scoured as only Aunty Patch could scour. The cows already milked, and gone to pasture, lowed with delight as they scented the dewy grass. Strange how still it seemed with so many voices of Nature in the air! Stranger still, how sad it seemed with tree and sky and blazing sun all in their very brightest colors! Two yellow-birds came fluttering down upon a thistle by the roadside. Hist! what beauties! Fred stood still to admire them. They were taking their breakfast on thistle-seeds. Then thistles were good for something. Keep still, Fred! Hold! There they go bounding through the air in their wavy flight. But hark! what's that they are saying? "I cheated him! I cheated him! I cheated him well."

"How did they know?" Perhaps a little bird told them. No, they didn't know at all. It is not because other people know our sin, that sin is so hard to bear: it is because we know it.

Fred walked across the road. Aunt Massy's door was open. He felt like going in. She and Trudy were always kind; never thought ill of anybody, least of all of the boys. He would go in, and sun himself in their praises. As he came near, he heard Massy's voice sounding out so

strong and deep, that he stopped in surprise. She was reading the Bible: "He will not suffer thy foot to be moved. He that keepeth thee will not slumber."

Aunt Massy read as if she believed every word, and believed it for herself. And then there was a little pause; and then came the same voice, only a little deeper, and at the same time more hushed. Aunt Massy was praying. Fred stood as still as if he had been in church. Every word came to him, and touched him with a strange power. She thanked God for all his mercies, and for his gifts, "more and better than she could think of or ask;" for the new day their lives were spared to see; for "all the blessings and comforts of this mortal lot;" for daily bread; for friends and helpers in their old age; and then, as if suddenly remembering that Trudy's luxurious taste for cake had been gratified, she poured forth a fervent prayer for blessings upon the dear young children, whose tender hearts remembered the need of the poor and helpless. "Seal them as thine own, O Father, in the dew of their youth, and in the freshness of their mornin'; and make them pillars in thy sanctuary, and blessin's to the world."

And then the two old sisters repeated together the Lord's Prayer, just like two little children, as, indeed, they were. Fred's heart smote him as

they prayed, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Fred didn't go into the cottage. He felt, somehow, as if their praises would be worse than the judgment-seat. He went home. He said nothing about his purpose to the other boys, but his mind was made up.

He would not endure this torment any longer. He would do what he could to atone for his fault. It would be worse than useless to try to persuade the other boys to do any thing together. They would never agree. Ward would only bully and threaten him, if he proposed it. At the same time, he could not do any thing that would expose them. He was their partner in a business company. He was bound to act for their interests, and with their consent, in any thing pertaining to the business. The plan on which his mind settled was this: He would write to his father that very day, asking for one dollar and seventy-five cents for a particular purpose. He would work and make it up when he came home; or, if Mr. Grant wanted the money at once, he could sell Fred's hens, and take his pay in that way. He must have the money at any cost. And he would beg his father to send it as soon as possible. When he got the money, he would send it to Spring by the post-office, with a paper marked "Conscience," and then he should feel better.

He staid at home that forenoon, — it was Saturday, — and wrote his letter. It happened that Prince was going to the village that very day, and he invited Fred to go with him. Just what he wanted. He could mail his letter at once. Father would get it that very afternoon. On the way home from town, Prince told Fred, what none of the other boys knew, he was going to *mash* on Monday. Fred's lips quivered with eagerness to say, "O Prince! won't you take me?" But he didn't say it. Prince didn't like teasing.

But, all of his own motion, Prince said to Fred, "Be all ready Monday morning, Fred. We shall have a hard day's work with that salt-hay."

The tears fairly started to Fred's eyes, he was so happy.

"You needn't say any thing about it to the other boys, Fred. I shall only take Ward and you, and perhaps Jimmy Pratt. He's worked well too."

"Oh, yes, do take Jimmy! He wants to go as much as I do."

"Well, well; we'll see."

Fred's face was radiant when he got home. He had resolved to do his duty, and he had a right to be happy. The means of happiness were at hand. He was going to *mash* on Monday.

"Thieves don't carry that kind of a face,"

thought Aunty, as she glanced at Fred at dinner. There was nothing ugly in the other faces either, although none looked so happy as Fred's. The cloud began to look lighter.

Aunty fairly sung as she tended the Saturday baking in the big oven that afternoon. She was in the thick of it when a horse and buggy drove up to the door, and stopped.

"Go see who it is, Maria Jane. I ain't fit to see anybody."

Maria Jane came back, saying that it was Mr. Grant.

CHAPTER XVII.

GOING TO "MASH."

"WHAT on earth does he want, right atween the pies and pudding, child?"

"Oh! he told me to say that he wanted to see Fred. He would not trouble you. He knew it was your busiest time."

"Well, that's thoughtful. Fred's in the barn, I reckon. Go and call him, Maria; and tell Mr. Grant I'll be happy to see him before he goes back. Time and pies won't wait for no man."

Fred was soon found. He was not expecting his father. He wondered whether his letter of that morning had been received. Perhaps his father had driven down that very afternoon on purpose to bring him the money. How kind if he had!

"Fred, jump in, and take a turn with me," said his father.

They drove down the road a little way.

"How's mother?"

"Quite well."

"And Alice and Mary?"

"They were well when last heard from. They were enjoying their visit in Upfields."

"Is Tom at home?"

"Yes; couldn't leave the store without him. He will take a vacation later. Fred, I got your note this noon. What can I do for you? Are you in any trouble?"

Fred blushed.

"No — that is, I sha'n't be, if you let me have the money."

"Would you be willing to tell me what you want it for, Fred?"

"Oh, don't ask me, father! I really can't tell; I can't; I'm sorry, but I can't."

Fred's distress was so great at this request, that Mr. Grant did not press it. But he thought to himself, "I don't like the look of this. It isn't like Fred to have secrets."

"I suppose you've spent all the money I gave you, Fred?"

"Yes. Most of it went for fishing-tackle; and then the boys have been treating Aunt Massy. You see" —

Here Fred blushed so red, and looked so uncomfortable, that Mr. Grant couldn't understand it.

Why should Fred be ashamed of treating a poor woman? No harm in that. Mr. Grant said

that he was glad the money had been so well used. "I like to have you remember the poor, Fred."

Fred said nothing.

Mr. Grant did not urge his son any further. He did not value compulsory confidence. A dollar and seventy-five cents was more than he usually gave Fred at one time. But he took out his pocket-book, and counted out the money.

"There Fred, there's the money. I don't mind that; but I do not like to have my son spending money in a way he is ashamed to explain."

Fred's honey turned to gall. He was thankful for the money. Now he could pay Spring. But his father was displeased, and with good reason.

They drove back to Aunty's in silence. Fred ran up stairs to his room. He meant to have that money enclosed to Spring that very moment. Meantime the pies were out of the oven, and the beans and pudding in; and Aunty, tidied up for supper, came smiling to the front-door to see Mr. Grant.

She wouldn't hear of his not coming in; had set her heart on his staying to supper. But Mr. Grant had promised to be home to a late tea. He came in for a few minutes, however, and was received in the parlor, a place far too wonderful to describe. Mr. Grant, however, did not notice any of the wonders. He seemed disturbed about something.

Aunty's quick sensibilities felt it. "I hope you find Fred as well as you expected, sir?"

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Patch! He has gained every way in the fortnight he has been with you, — every way but one, I fear I must say."

"What's that, Mr. Grant?"

"Oh! nothing that you're responsible for, Mrs. Patch. I have all confidence in you and Prince. I wish I felt as much in myself. But Fred has always been an outspoken little fellow; never could keep a secret, — his own, or anybody's else; and I'm sorry to find that he has something on his mind which he refuses to confide to me."

"Nothin' wrong, I'll be bound. He's got the cleanest face of 'em all. I was noticing it this very day, at dinner."

"I'm glad he keeps his face clean. I hope he is as careful of his hands. But you and I should have no secrets because the boys do. Let me tell you what troubles me. I got a note this noon from Fred, asking me to let him have a dollar and seventy-five cents for a particular purpose. It is not a large sum, but it is more than he commonly asks for; and I drove down this afternoon to see him about it. He is more agitated than I like to see, and says he cannot tell me any thing about it. I've given him the money; but I do not feel easy about it."

"A dollar and seventy-five cents, did you say?"

"Yes, that's the sum; not worth worrying about, I know."

"Dear me! I'm not so sure of that," says Aunty, looking troubled. "Wait a bit, Mr. Grant, till I call Prince in. He's a better hand than I am at managing the boys."

When Prince came in, and heard how matters stood, he looked so bright, that Aunty felt like scolding him.

"Mother, you let me work this thing out. Mr. Grant, I think I know what Fred wants that money for. The boys have been up to a little mischief with Spring, the baker, — took advantage of my being away, and mother being busy in the house, — and I reckon they took more of the baker's cake than they paid for. Hadn't ought'er done it. 'Twa'n't right. 'Twa'n't like 'em. Fred means to send that money to Spring: I'm sure on't. Wasn't that the price Spring put on his ginger-things, mother?"

"Yes, but how should Fred know it? Oh! I remember now: he was at home the morning the baker came to make his complaint. Maria Jane told me he was sleeping in his room. I was afraid he was sick, and meant to ask him; but he was all right at dinner-time, so I said nothin' about it. He might have overheard Spring. He talked loud enough, and banged on the door till I thought he'd take the house down."

"That's it, sartin," said Prince. "Just let me work it; all come out right, Mr. Grant."

Mr. Grant looked sober. He didn't like it any better after the explanation than before; not so well. Was it possible that Fred would have a hand in a robbery? for that was what it was. The more he thought of it, the less he liked it.

"I do not doubt your skill, Prince, or your judgment. I would trust Fred with you sooner than any other man I know, and your mother knows how entirely I confide in her; but, the more I think about it, the more sure I feel that Fred had better go home with me. I know he will feel badly; but it will do him good. He ought to feel badly. Yes, I am sure that is the thing to do: he shall go home with me to-night."

"Just as you say, sir. Only I'll take my oath Fred's the least to blame of 'em all. I'll ferret the thing out before another week's gone."

"May I trouble you to pack his bag, and send it up by express on Monday, Mrs. Patch?"

"Oh, no trouble in that, sir! but I am troubled to have Fred go. He's one of our best boys, Mr. Grant. He and Jimmy Pratt were about the only firm that didn't break up in a row when the boys played trades this summer."

"I am very glad to hear it: it shows Fred is learning. He and Jimmy have not always been peaceful partners. I do not think there's any

thing really vicious in Fred; but he needs trimming. Better early than late for that, Mrs. Patch."

Aunty couldn't gainsay the truth of this. She had often said something like it herself.

There was no time for long farewells. Fred couldn't have gone through with it without crying, and he wouldn't have the boys see him in that state.

"Good-by, Aunty: say good-by to Prince and — and all the boys — for me."

Fred wasn't crying, but Aunty was. He had his turn later, when he was alone in his — But what a shame to tell of him, when he never meant anybody should know it!

He dropped his letter, or enclosure rather, to Spring, in the post-office that very night; and in spite of his exile from Berrytown, and his disappointment about going to *mash*, he went to sleep with an easier conscience, and more peaceful feeling, than he had had since the Precious Mining Co. began to stray from legitimate business. He was clear of that "Co.," any way. There was comfort in that.

"Where's Fred Grant?" said the boys that evening at supper, when they noticed his place at the table was empty.

"Gone home with his father," said Aunty.

"What for? When's he coming back?"

"Afraid his father doesn't like our company for Fred," says Aunty. "He isn't coming back at all."

"What's that? Not like our company?" said Ward in a disgusted way.

"Your Mining Co. perhaps she means, Matt," said Prince, as he passed through the kitchen.

Ward blushed; all the other boys blushed redder yet; and Prince went out.

"What's all this? You ain't merchanting again, I hope, boys?"

"No, only speculating in stocks, you know," said Ward.

"Well, there'll be a big investment in birch stock, if Prince catches you up to any of your old shines: that's all."

Supper passed; bedtime soon followed. Stormy meeting of the board of the Precious Mining Co. that night; every boy sure that Fred's sudden departure had something to do with their secret.

"Hope he hasn't blabbed," said Smith.

"Just like him," said Ward. "We'll cut him dead when we get back to Jeruh if he has."

"Fred's no tell-tale," said Jimmy.

"No, Fred wouldn't tell," said all the boys except Ward.

"Well, you see if he don't get us all into trouble with his snivelling, and making things worse than they are."

"Like to know who's already got us into trouble by calling things false names, and making them better than they are," said Jimmy.

"Oh, of course it's all my doing!" said Ward. "You took as much as anybody, Pratt: better stop your sauce, or I'll nail you."

"Well, stop calling Fred names, then. He's enough better than you are, any way."

Will there never be an end of the quarrelling that one ugly transaction with the baker has caused? Yes, when the wrong is atoned for, and made as near right as the boys can make it: not before.

The next day was Sunday. Prince took half a dozen of the boys to church in the morning, and Aunty took the rest in the afternoon. It was a dull day for everybody at the farmhouse; not at all like the happy, restful sabbaths Aunty generally had. She could hardly keep patient with the boys, when she thought of Fred banished from her house only because he was the best of the lot, and was trying to make reparation to Spring. There was no right or justice in it; and it was with difficulty Prince persuaded her to keep still, and let the leaven work. "Never bake your bread till it's riz, mother!"

"Dear me, Prince! Have I lived to this age to learn that from you?"

"No, no, marmy; but just let the thing alone

till I get back from *mash*. I promise you I'll fix it."

"Yes! and what's to become of Fred all this time? It's a perfect shame to keep that boy suffering just because he has some honor and conscience about him."

"Oh! he don't suffer half so much, — if he is doing the right thing, and I believe he is, — half so much as the others. 'The way of the transgressor is hard:' that was the text this very morning. What did the parson preach about this afternoon?"

"Something about trusting in the Lord, and waiting patiently, I believe. I couldn't fix my mind on the sermon, I was so worried about the boys."

"'Fraid you weren't trusting enough, were you?"

"Oh! I can trust in the Lord: 'tain't that. It's folks I can't trust in, — men and women, and boys."

"But that ain't fair, mother. I ain't much of a hand at preachin', you know; but I reckon that verse means you must keep trusting in the Lord, and waiting for him to make folks trusty, and bring it all right in the end. 'Tain't no virtue to be patient with the Lord: it's the folks he's made that makes a fellow cross. Come, now, you keep up heart: let the boys feel that you keep lov-

ing 'em, bad or good, and they'll come out square; see if they don't."

"Goodness, Prince, what a preacher you'd make! I'd ought to sent you to the 'cademy. But then, like as not, they'd 'a' bled you to death. These book-men allers look as if somethin' ailed 'em."

"Never mind, mother, you taught me to know beans. Don't I smell 'em now? Let's have supper."

That evening Prince told the boys that he was going to *mash* the next day. He should start very early, and should take two teams. He himself should go in the first team, with Tim and two of the boys. The others would come later, and meet him at the landing, when he came back in the evening with the gundalow. According to this arrangement, only two of the boys could go on the big boat; and a great outcry was raised to settle who should be the favored two. "Take me! no, take me, Prince! You promised to, almost, — just as good as promised. I'll work as much as Ward."

It seemed to be taken for granted that Ward would go, because he was the strongest. But the ten candidates for the other place, were, to say the least, nine too many. They made so much noise that Aunty put a stop to it all, by sending them to bed at once. "Anybody'd think my

house was a den of thieves, to hear that racket a Sunday night."

"You shall be called when you're wanted, boys," said Prince. "That's all you'll get out of me to-night."

It had all been arranged beforehand. Ward had been told that he was to go; and, since Fred's departure, Prince had let Jimmy know that he could go too. Fred had asked Prince to take Jimmy; and, now that Fred could not go himself, there would be plenty of room. Prince told this to Jimmy. He wished him to feel that he owed something to Fred's generosity.

There was no escaping the boys the next morning. They were all awake by daylight; and Ward and Jimmy tried in vain to dress quietly, and get down stairs without the others. "We won't stop for breakfast, mother. We can eat as we ride along. Might as well take breakfast inside of a coffee-grinder, as here with these boys round."

"All right. You'll find your coffee in the stone jug."

Tim brought the horse and wagon to the door. Prince jumped in. Ward and Jimmy tumbled in behind.

"Get out of that, Pratt."

"Prince won't take *you*. He's going to take me; ain't you, Prince?" — "No, me!" — "No, me! he said he'd take me!" and so they all clamored.

"Come, Tim! Look out, boys, or some of you'll go to smash with a vengeance."

Off started Bess as if the wolves were upon her; and no wonder if she thought so. Such a howling pursued them as only wolves or boys could make.

That very afternoon, when the other team had gone with the other boys, as Aunty was "reddin' up a little," as she called it, she heard the jingling of bells on the road.

"There's that baker. Needn't stop here. I wish I might never see him again."

But he did stop. He drove straight up to the door as if he belonged there, and stopped his horse, with a loud "Whoa, there!"

"Maria, tell Mr. Spring we don't want any thing," said Aunty.

Maria Jane obeyed, but returned to say that Spring begged Miss Patch to see him a minute on "particular business."

"Well, Mr. Spring, what is it?"

Mrs. Patch came to the door as she said this.

Spring had his pocket-book out, and was fumbling in it for something.

"Oh, here 'tis! Miss Patch, you don't know anybody that keeps his conscience in Jeruh, do you?"

"I know a good many ez keeps their consciences in Jerusalem, Mr. Spring; and some ez don't keep any at all, — costs too much."

"Well, no offence, I'm sure. But I received this bit of paper from Jeruh this morning, marked 'Conscience,' and with it one dollar and seventy-five cents in lawful money. It's just the amount of my loss that I told you about the other day; and I thought whether or no it might 'a' been intended by somebody, to make the loss good. Any way, I'm willin' to take it so. Can't think of anybody owing me that sum, without 'tis for that cake. So, if you please, we'll call it square, and say no more about it."

Aunty would have given her best black gown if she could have answered, "No, Mr. Spring, we will not call it square. You've insulted me and my young gentlemen. I demand an apology."

As it was, she was fearful that an apology was due from her side. She simply answered that she had not introduced the subject, and did not care to say or hear any thing more about it.

"Can I serve you with any thing to-day, mum?"

"Nothing at all."

"Hope the young gentlemen are well, mum?"

Aunty started to say, "Yes, thanks to their not eating your cake. They gave it to the hens." But that would have been a confession of the theft. Prince had told her, in one of their consultations, about his discoveries in the barn-yard.

"Pretty well, thank you."

"Ain't gone away, I hope. Don't see 'em round this afternoon."

"No: they're after salt-hay with Prince."

She did not tell him Fred had gone to Jeruh. She would not have him know that for any thing. He would be just mean enough to believe Fred stole the cake, if he suspected that he sent the money.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Spring."

"Good day, mum."

"Maria Jane," said Aunty later in the day, "I believe I'll run over and sit with the Wheelers an hour. Fact is, I'm dying for young company, you see. I'll be home to help get supper."

The old sisters were delighted to see Aunty. So good of her to give them her precious time! They listened with eyes and ears. Since their hearing began to fail, they used their eyes "considerable for hearing;" and, with the aid of spectacles, they really heard very well. So they were all attention while Aunty poured forth the story of her active labors. Their exclamations of admiration and approval were just in the right places, and fell upon Aunty's careworn heart like rain upon the dusty highway.

The only break in the comfort of this little visit was when the sisters inquired for Master Fred. They hadn't seen him lately among the boys.

"No: he went home with his father on Saturday."

And wasn't coming back?

No: his bag had been sent that day, by express.

Wasn't it sudden, his going? The two sisters kept returning to the subject, as if they could not get over Fred's leaving without coming to see them.

Aunty could not explain; but it did her heart good to hear them talk in their fond, foolish way about Fred.

"Such a handy little fellow! Took to my wheel as nat'ral ez life," says Massy. Yes, indeed, Fred was "a diamond of a boy."

CHAPTER XVIII.

ALL RIGHT.

THERE was no time that night to hear the story of the day's adventures. The hay-makers came home late, thoroughly tired, and glad to get to bed. The next day brought its duties and sports; and it was not until Tuesday evening that the talk turned upon the famous excursion to Clam Cove.

Aunty had taken occasion, meantime, to tell Prince what Spring, the baker, had said.

"Just as I thought, you see."

"Yes, no doubt about it; that is, no doubt Fred sent the money. We don't positively know any thing yet, however," said Prince.

"Nonsense; we know enough, — all we shall ever know, unless something is done about it quick."

Prince had then agreed that Aunty should try her way of getting at the truth that very night; and, if she failed, he would see what he could do.

They were all sitting on or near the front door-

step. Aunty was on the doorsill, and Prince lay full length on the grass.

"Fetch out the arm-chair, boys. I can't have Prince catching cold on the damp grass."

"Why, mother, the grass is as dry as one of Spring's jumbles."

"All the worse, then. You'll be eaten up by ants."

Prince wouldn't have the chair. He'd go and sit in the fireplace, if his mother wanted him to. As a compromise, he sat on an old butter-firkin that happened to be near him.

"Tell us about the salt-haying, boys. How did you like it? More salt than potatoes, wasn't it? I guess you were glad to get home. How was it, Matthew?"

Ward was an old stager. He had been on that road before. Couldn't get him to say much about it. But Jimmy, who had been for the first time, was as communicative as anybody could wish. He gave a really glowing account of the voyage and its adventures, and excited anew the envy of his companions by his story.

"How Fred Grant would have liked it!" said Tom Smith.

"Yes, that's so," said Prince. "I meant to take Fred. He fairly earned the right to go; but his father came just the wrong time."

"Yes, Fred looked very happy that last day he

was here, before Mr. Grant came, after that ride with you, Prince. I suppose you told him then you meant to take him to *mash*," said Aunty.

"Yes; and you never saw a jollier little fellow, just boiling over all the way home."

"I'm sorry Fred had to go home; but I am still sorrier for the cause."

"What was the matter, Aunty?" said Jimmy. "Anybody sick, or any thing?"

"No: only his father preferred he should go."

"How strange! His father told him he might spend his whole vacation here, when he came down with me."

"Well, something happened that made him change his mind."

"Do you know what?"

"Yes, something about some money."

"Money?" said Harry Smith. "Fred hadn't any. He told me he spent his last cent buying Roxbury crackers" — Here Harry stopped.

"Yes, he spent all he had buying crackers and cake for Aunt Massy. Guess some other boys did the same. No harm in that: never need be ashamed if you do nothing worse than that, boys. But Fred wanted some more money, — more than his father usually gave him at one time, — and he wrote to his father for it; and, when his father came to bring it to him, he wouldn't tell what he wanted it for. Mr. Grant didn't care for the money, but he didn't

like Fred's secrecy. Nothin' honest is afraid of the light, boys. So Mr. Grant, he gave Fred the money, but decided to take him home."

"Too bad," said two or three boys.

"How much money did Fred ask for, Aunty?" said Jimmy.

"One dollar and seventy-five cents."

There was a pause. No boy spoke: they saw it all. Aunty went on, —

"I've been disappointed in Fred, boys: I always thought he was an honest boy; a little quick sometimes, but always open as the day. But I think I must tell you about this business, because it concerns you too. Mr. Spring, our baker, lost some cakes one day. He had the impudence to hint to me that you took 'em; but I shut him up quick. I told him you were young gentlemen. He said the stuff he'd lost was worth a dollar and seventy-five cents. Fred heard him, I suppose, for he talked loud enough, and Fred was up stairs alone that morning; that's how he knew the worth of the cakes. When Mr. Grant told me that Fred had sent to him for just that sum o' money, I couldn't help putting two and two together; and I'm afraid Fred must have taken the cakes, and then for fear of being found out, or something, he's sent the money to Spring. Can't be much doubt about it; for on'y yesterday, when you were at *mash*, Spring came round, and showed me a slip

of paper marked 'Conscience,' which he said came to him that morning from Jeruh, with one dollar and seventy-five cents enclosed. Now, I've no manner o' doubt that Fred sent Spring that money; and there's where the cake went. I *am* disappointed in Fred."

Then came a pause; only for a moment, however.

"Aunty," said Jimmy, "it's a mean shame! I don't care what you say, fellows. We all did it, Aunty: *I* did it!"

"Dear me! dear me! boys, is this so?" Aunty was rubbing her eyes as if she couldn't see straight.

"Yes, Jimmy's told the truth," said two or three of the other boys. "We did it for fun."

Something sounded like a thunder-clap. It was Prince: he had slapped his own leg.

"I knew it!" said he.

"We didn't mean any harm," whined Simpson. "Ward called it filibustering; but Fred said it was stealing. He wanted"—

A look from Ward stopped Simpson where he was.

"We did it," said Ward, "that's enough. 'Tain't fair for Grant to pay for it. Let's make up the money, and send it to him."

"And who's to make up the going to mash Fred's lost, and the rest of the vacation at Berrytown?"

That was not so easily managed.

"Too bad. Besides," said Jimmy, "Fred didn't really take any cake. He was buying crackers when we took it."

"Allers the way: the lambs perish, and the dogs run away," said Aunty.

"What shall we do, Aunty? We'll do any thing, only tell us what."

"I can't tell. It's a sight easier, if folks would only see it, to do right in the first place."

"Prince, you tell us. We must do something. We'll make up the money to Fred, of course; but that isn't enough."

"Hardly."

"What more can we do?"

"Not much. You might write him a letter, and thank him for minding your honor, and forgettin' his own pleasure."

"And all of us sign it. And if you'll write a letter to Mr. Grant, Prince, perhaps he'll let Fred come back."

"'Fraid not. The gentleman that lost his head in the lion's mouth never trusted his head there again."

"There's no harm in trying, Prince. Come, you write to Mr. Grant, and we'll write to Fred."

"Then, there's Spring," said Aunty: "what's to be done with him?"

"Let him alone," said Ward. "He's got his

cake's worth, and we didn't get our money's worth."

"No, that won't do."

"Well, what shall we do?"

"I don't see but you'll have to ask his pardon."

"O Aunty! must we?—ask pardon of that mean old fellow?"

"Why not? Haven't you injured him?"

There was no denying that. But it was the hardest part of the penalty to be obliged to humble themselves before Spring.

Aunty was resolved that they should do it, although it hurt her own pride as much as theirs.

Must they do any thing else? The boys were sure nothing would be hard to do, in comparison with this last demand upon them.

"That depends on whether anybody else has been injured: you can judge of that, boys."

"You and Prince, Aunty."

"Yes: I'm glad you think of that. Any thing hurts me that hurts the character of my boys. But you needn't do any thing for us, Prince and me: we'll take our satisfaction in seeing you do right by the others."

"And then there's Aunt Massy and Aunt Trudy," said Jimmy: "it wasn't fair to make them eat stolen cake, good old souls! and they gave us apples too, in return for the cake."

"That's so."

"Don't make the boys confess to them, mother. It 'ud do no good; only break the old women's hearts."

"Well, they needn't; only I do say it wasn't fair to Trudy. Folks have enough to do to eat their own peck o' dirt in this world, without eating other people's."

"We'll buy Spring all out, next time he comes, and give it all to the Wheelers."

"No, you don't. I won't have my best friends imposed upon any more. It's just blasphèmous for those poor souls to be thanking the Lord for cakes of Spring's making. I'll bake an extra tin whenever I bake for myself, and you may take it over to 'em, boys."

"Good! only that won't be our doing."

"Well, you can chop wood for 'em, and help do their outdoor chores."

"All right! Is there anybody else that we've injured?"

"Yes, boys," says Aunty in a deep, earnest voice; "Him as made you. Your own hearts must make it right with him. 'A broken and a contrite heart,' that's his portion."

Nobody spoke for a full minute; and then Jimmy proposed that they write the letter to Fred at once.

"You write it, Jimmy, and we'll all sign it."

Jimmy wrote it that very night, and all the

boys signed it before they went to bed. Prince wrote his letter to Mr. Grant, and both letters went by the same mail the next day.

Mr. Grant was wiping the perspiration from his forehead after a hot day at the office, and preparing to go home, when his mail was brought to him. "Master Frederic Grant, care of F. Grant, sen., Esq., Jeruh, Mass."

"Hallo, a letter for Fred from Berrytown! hope it won't make him homesick to go back. 'Mr. Frederic Grant, sen., Jeruh, Mass.,' post-marked Berrytown. That's for me, it seems." He opened, and read in Prince's squarest handwriting the following:—

MR. GRANT, — It is jest as I told you. All the boys was in the same boat in that business with Spring. They have told mother and me all about it, and Fred wasn't no more to blame than any of 'em; not so much neither, for they all say he didn't take any of the cake himself, but only bought crackers in front while they took the cake behind. Somebody in Jeruh has sent Spring a dollar and seventy-five cents. You can guess who done it. The baker says it's all right. He don't suspect Fred of sending it. But mother says the boys must ask Spring's pardon, so he will know that they all done it. The boys are all heartily sorry; and Fred's handsome way of doing was what made them ashamed of themselves. They have written him a letter thanking him, and begging his pardon for letting him bear the burden alone. I reckon they won't do so again. It's taught 'em a lesson they won't forgit easy. Now, I'm writing this because I promised the boys I'd write and ask you

to let Fred come back. We all wish you would. There sha'n't be no more trouble, I assure you. I'm afraid you will not want to trust Fred with us again ; but seems to me, — if I may say so, — such a boy as that can be pretty well trusted to himself. We're all proud of the way Fred's acted, and I wish you'd tell him so. With best respects to you and Mrs. Grant, and the same to Fred Grant, jun., I am Truly yours,

THOS. PRINCE PATCH.

P.S. — The fact is, I am most to blame in this matter. I formed a joint-stock company among the boys, to help get in the hay. When that job was done, having nothing useful to do, they done the mischief. One bad man can make a dozen good men responsible for his bad acts in these stock companies. Perhaps that is what they're for.

If it had been a business letter announcing that his last venture to Buenos Ayres had doubled his fortune, Mr. Grant could not have felt happier. That little postscript of Prince's helped explain Fred's silence. He was bound to stand by his partners, — bound in honor not to act against their interests. Mr. Grant had taught him this himself. Not that Fred would have told tales of his playmates if there had been no co-partnership, but he might have kept out of the scrape to begin with, but for that; and would have acted more freely in the way of reparation afterwards, if there had been no peculiar claim upon him. On his way home Mr. Grant bought some magnificent high-bush blackberries for supper. Fred liked them.

"Wife," said he at supper, "suppose we take our long-talked-of trip to the White Mountains next week. Fred would like to go; wouldn't you, Fred?"

Wouldn't he? Nothing he would like better.

"Well, we'll go, if your mother can get ready."

Mrs. Grant was delighted at the prospect. She would begin her preparations that very night.

Fred thought it was too much happiness,—wondered his father could be so good to him when he had behaved so badly. He longed to tell him where the money went, and have nothing concealed from him. But he could not do it: in justice to his partners, he felt he must not do it.

"Fred, here's a letter for you: came this afternoon from Berrytown."

"For me, father! from Berrytown? Who wrote it? Oh, it's Jimmy's handwriting!" Fred opened it eagerly.

"Telling you about his trip to *mash*, perhaps. I'm afraid it will make you want to go back, Fred. You won't care for the White Mountains now."

Fred's face was a study, or would have been if Mr. Grant had looked at him. He was too generous to do it. Mrs. Grant was so much preoccupied with the sudden prospect of a journey, that she did not notice Fred. Tom, who was the only other member of the family at home, saw Fred's face change as he read the note. Curiosity,

surprise, dread, shame, relief, and then such a look of mingled agony and joy, as the boy turned from the table, and ran out of the room, was too much for even lazy Tom's usual indifference. "What's the matter, Fred? Anybody dead or married?"

"Let him alone, Tom. Don't disturb him, wife. Fred is all right. He has behaved very handsomely in a matter of difference among the boys, and that letter is written to tell him so. I got one from Prince, to-day explaining every thing. I am perfectly satisfied."

Mrs. Grant looked happier than all the mountains in the world could have made her. Tom looked puzzled, but soon gave it up as "too much trouble."

An hour later Mrs. Grant knocked at Fred's door. No answer at first. She knocked again: "Fred, are you here?"

"Yes'm."

"May I come in?"

"Yes."

And then they had a little talk together, mother and son; and it's no business of yours or mine what they said, but they both went to bed very happy that night. Fred was happy, because, although he had done wrong, he had done what he could to make it right; and now there was nothing to conceal. And his mother was happy

because she was Fred's mother: that was enough.

"Which shall it be, Fred, — back to Berrytown, or on to Mount Washington?" said his father, the next morning, at breakfast. "You shall have your choice."

"Thank you, father. I'd like to go to the mountains."

"You're sure you prefer it?"

"Yes, sure."

Fred didn't give his reasons. But I think he had a feeling that he should not like to go back among the boys, and be lionized for having done his duty. Then, he wanted to see the White Mountains; of course he did.

There was only half a week in which to get ready. Mrs. Grant was very busy all that time: so Fred and his father had to take their rides without her. One day they went to Upfields, and saw Alice and Mary; and didn't the girls tease their father to take them with him to the mountains! But no; this was Fred's own trip: they could not go this time.

But the best ride of all was on Saturday afternoon; down Pine Street, past the town-pump, along Washington Avenue, past the planing-mills, over the drawbridge, — it was down now: just Fred's luck! — up the long avenue of trees, past the cosey houses, past the Stanley elms, and the

gleaming harbor, and the Stanley mansion; and who was that in the road near Farmer Green's? Molly herself! "How d'you do, Molly?" cried Fred, as they drove by the farmhouse. The girl looked astounded. On they rode at Whiteheart's best pace; check at the railroad-crossing — hark! no cars coming! on and on, past green meadows, rocky pastures, a cool, winding stream where the ducks were plashing (who wouldn't be a duck, if he could, in August? he must be a goose already), up the hills, and down the hills, and away to the rolling, dashing, foaming sea; a long stretch across the sounding beach, and then home over the floating bridge.

Some difference between this ride and the ride these two had taken the Saturday before. And yet the road from Berrytown to Jeruh was every whit as beautiful as this. The difference was in their hearts. The world is only beautiful when hearts are true and kind. They passed Farmer Green as they turned into Pine Street, as they were nearing home.

He bowed and smiled, and said, "All right!" as he passed them. Queer way of saying, "How d'you do?"

Fred did not understand it for at least five minutes. During that time Tom had taken Whiteheart to the stable. Mr. Grant and Fred had walked into the yard. They stood by the coop to admire the hens, a goodly company now.

"Fred," said his father, "do you see any improvement in the stock?"

Fred looked. What was that standing among the hens, as if he were lord of all he surveyed? No: it couldn't be! Yes: it was! No mistaking the curve of that neck, the sweep of that tail, the amber and emerald and topaz in that bird; it was, it must be, old "Niagara," Farmer Green's magnificent rooster!

"He's yours, Fred: I thought you'd like him. That was a bad business you got into at Aunty's. All right to stand by partners; but don't go partners again in a business that isn't honest. Prince wrote me all about it. I am pleased with you, Fred."

"What's the matter, Fred?"

If that was not the meaning of old Niagara's eye, as he turned his head, and looked into Fred's red eyes, hid under his hat-brim, what did he mean?

"OOK—UR—OOK—UR—OO—OO—OO—OO—OOR—R—R—R—R—R—R—R!!!" What a roar!

"Save the pieces, boys!"

FINIS.

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The following verbatim copy of a letter from a "little woman" is a specimen of many which enthusiasm for her book has dictated to the author of "Little Women:" —

——— March 12, 1870.

DEAR JO, OR MISS ALCOTT, — We have all been reading "Little Women," and we liked it so much I could not help wanting to write to you. We think *you* are perfectly splendid; I like you better every time I read it. We were all so disappointed about your not marrying Laurie; I cried over that part, — I could not help it. We all liked Laurie ever so much, and almost killed ourselves laughing over the funny things you and he said.

We are six sisters and two brothers; and there were so many things in "Little Women" that seemed so natural, especially selling the rags.

Eddie is the oldest; then there is Annie (our Meg), then Nelly (that's me), May and Milly (our Beths), Rosie, Rollie, and dear little Carrie (the baby). Eddie goes away to school, and when he comes home for the holidays we have lots of fun, playing cricket, croquet, base ball, and every thing. If you ever want to play any of those games, just come to our house, and you will find plenty children to play with you.

If you ever come to ———, I do wish you would come and see us, — we would like it so much.

I have named my doll after you, and I hope she will try and deserve it.

I do wish you would send me a picture of you. I hope your health is better and you are having a nice time.

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A specimen letter from a little woman to the author of "Little Men."

June 17, 1871.

DEAR MISS ALCOTT, — We have just finished "Little Men," and like it so much that we thought we would write and ask you to write another book sequel to "Little Men," and have more about Laurie and Amy, as we like them the best. We are the Literary Club, and we got the idea from "Little Women." We have a paper two sheets of foolscap and a half. There are four of us, two cousins and my sister and myself. Our assumed names are: Horace Greeley, President; Susan B. Anthony, Editor; Harriet B. Stowe, Vice-President; and myself, Anna C. Ritchie, Secretary. We call our paper the "Saturday Night," and we all write stories and have reports of sermons and of our meetings, and write about the queens of England. We did not know but you would like to hear this, as the idea sprang from your book; and we thought we would write, as we liked your book *so* much. And now, if it is not too much to ask of you, I wish you would answer this, as we are very impatient to know if you will write another book; and please answer soon, as Miss Anthony is going away, and she wishes very much to hear from you before she does. If you write, please direct to ——— Street, Brooklyn, N.Y.

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